

BROUGHTON A NOVEL

By
A.S. ARNOLD



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D. Westlake

BROUGHTON.



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BROUGHTON.

A Nobel.

BY

A. S. ARNOLD,

AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF THOMAS CARLYLE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BROUGHTON.

CHAPTER I.

It was night—damp, cold, starless. A woman, with strongly-marked features, sat before a clean hearth in a small two-roomed cottage. A bright fire reflected a glow on the whole interior. On one side of the solitary inmate was a strong wooden cradle, upon the rocker of which her foot was in constant motion, as she knitted without intermission and softly hummed her plaintive lullaby.

A round table was on the other side of that homely figure, upon which was laid a fairly clean white cloth, a black-hafted knife and fork, mustard-pot and salt-cellar, in preparation for her husband's home-coming. Under the window was a hard wooden settle, upon which a very weary man might

stretch his tired limbs until they ached with the hardness. A long square table on the opposite side, white with scrubbing and containing two drawers, completed the furniture in that humble abode.

Mrs. Atkins was pre-eminently tidy and methodical. She was strong and practical, yet remarkably imaginative and tender-hearted. Of the last mentioned qualities she was quite ashamed. She trembled nervously as she thus sat alone in unutterable silence. She almost wished the child would wake and disturb the ominous hush. She recalled the scene outside upon which her eyes had last rested. We will describe it. In the background a low, long hill, darkly wooded, from the entrance of which to the main road was a narrow neglected lane, grass-grown, stone-bestrewed, muddy, on either side of which, instead of a charming hedge, ran a low, rough, stone wall. This road had one narrow well-worn path, upon which colliers paced backwards and forwards to their dreary labour. It was a short cut to the pits on the other side of East Wood.

She had been located but a few days in this

solitary dwelling, and was by no means charmed by her surroundings. Her thoughts wandered back to her unmarried days, when she was in domestic service. She half regretted those days, though she would not have confessed as much for the world.

Suddenly the partially-closed door creaked. She heard no step; her heart beat convulsively, and, turning round, what was her horror to see a pair of glittering eyes. All she saw was the eyes, scarcely conscious whether they were in a head at all, or, if they were, to what species the head might belong. She screamed, and they immediately vanished.

"A witch!" she exclaimed, superstitiously. "Oh, my bonnie bairn, has it harmed thee?"

And bending down, she took the sleeping infant in her arms to satisfy herself as to its condition.

And so she sat, nearer to the fire, horribly afraid, while the place seemed full of glowing eyes, and eyes only. The candle was flickering in its socket, the fire was slowly dying. She was cold too, but she dared not move.

Would John never come? What could he be doing? She heard a step at last, a real, human step; alas! it passed the door. Another hour of supernatural terror. The candle was out, the door ajar admitted a raw wind; remembering that there was some wood in the oven, she put it all on the fast-expiring embers. They flickered and broke out into a comforting blaze, just in time; again she heard a step, a stealthy one, that brought her heart to her mouth. A youth appeared, with wild, large, dark eyes staring wildly.

“Hide me, aunt—hide me!”

“Whatever is amiss, lad? You’re always up to summat; get out at the back. Surely them eyes came as a warning,” she muttered to herself as the lad crept away.

There was a dead silence, followed by a heavy step and a loud rap at the door.

“Well, missis,” said a gruff voice, “has anybody come in here? Where is he? I see’d him run down this lane.”

“You can see for yourself, sir. There’s nobody here.”

“He’s a caution whoever he be, and skedaddled

too sharp for me. I'd a good mind to fire on him. Night after night one or another on 'em keep me agate."

"Who is it, think yer?"

"Who is it!" exclaimed the bewildered game-keeper. "That's what I want to know. I only wish as 'ow I could catch him, and we'd soon know who he is."

"What has he been up to?"

"Trapping game—hares, rabbits, or birds, it's all t' same thing. One or another are always at it. One can't mak' poor folks see as 'ow it's as much stealing to rob a lord of his game as a poor man of his pig, while th' only reason young chaps gives for poaching is that they do it for a lark."

While the man stayed talking the lad was making good his escape, and Mrs. Atkins came to the conclusion that the gamekeeper was taking it pretty easy, so could not be over anxious to capture the runaway; and as she was extremely desirous that he should not, she began telling him of the late fright she had had.

"Lor' bless yer! This house has always been

said to be haunted. A witch lived up t' chimley many a long year, where some old fellah had hid money he'd stole from some servant lass he'd murdered down Van-dale. But there's no knowing what truth there is in it. Where's t' master?"

"He said he would bring up some more bits of things for t' house, but he must 'ave turned in somewhere. The Squire needn't 'ave sent us to live here. What good can we do again' gangs o' men? It is rare as one goes by hissen; and, besides, we're too far off the wood. They don't go the right road when they're up to mischief, but o'er walls and through hedges, you're sure."

"Right enough, the scamps! The Squire ought to let you live at Farm, but he has his good pints. He would niver turn out old Ketch because he can get no more out of him. When he dies off, as in t' natural order of things can't be long, you'll be all right."

"I don't care to wait for other men's shoes," replied the woman. "I only wish he'd give us a decent place now; but there, you'll never catch

t' feller, whoever he may be, if you keeps on talking wi' me, though I'm sure I'm much obliged to yer."

"Well, you know, I ain't as young as I once was; and what chance could I have when he's got that far? Worst on it is, there's more nor one as niver has been caught. Ello! there's some one a-coming down t' lane now, anyways."

It was John Atkins, head gardener to Squire Hoxton, of Broughton Hall, a tall, thin, delicate-looking man, with good features, pale hair, and fair beard.

"Weel, John, I thought as 'ow you were never coming no more." He smiled. There was an air of refinement about his pale face and well-cut features, and he spoke with much less provincialism than either his wife or the game-keeper, whom he eyed with slightly evident nervous agitation. "Well, sir," he said, "what on earth has brought you to our outlandish spot?"

"Some runaway scoundrel, who'se gi'en me a chase, I can tell yer, so far, out o' t' wood. Whither he grabbedd onything or not, I can't

tell. I'm afraid he heard me, and so made off. I'll wear rubber shoes. I seed him run up 'ere, and thought I seed him come in t' cottage; but your missis says as how nobbody has been in" (she had said no such thing), "and I can't trace him no further, and finding her terrified at some unnatural appearance, I tried to explain as 'ow this 'ouse has long sin' been said to be haunted."

John Atkins laughed—an uneasy laugh. He was no hero, morally or physically, but intensely respectable and most anxious to disguise all his weakness.

"Silly girl!" he said to his wife, "I thought you'd more sense."

"Well, I hope you'll see it yoursen, some of these days. I wonder what it could a come to *me* for? Anyhow it didn't come down t' chimley, but through that very door."

"What?" exclaimed her husband.

"I don't know, so there! It seemed to have eyes as big as itsen."

Both men laughed.

"Well, I never; I'll go after that, but I

leave yer in safe hands. Good night, John ; good night, Liza."

They were old acquaintances, but no sooner had the gamekeeper disappeared than John Atkins shut the door, and whispered : " Where is he ? "

" Our Joe ! I telled him to go out at t' back. Whativer has he been a doing on ? "

" What he is always doing. He'll come to the gallows some of these days, and bring us all to ruin. I've been stopping with mother, she is in such a way about him. She never knows a day's peace, for fear he'll be caught red-handed, but he's got some one to back him up, as we know note about, I feel certain sure. Creep out, Liza, and see if you can make him hear thee."

That was John Atkins precisely, and fortunately for him, he had a wife as brave as he was cowardly. If he had seen what she imagined *she* had seen, a cart and horse would scarcely have succeeded in dragging him out into the dark. But Liza immediately went to the back kitchen-door, opened it, and said in a loud whisper : " Joe, Joe ! "

There was no reply. Then she ventured across the yard, and looked over the low wall into the dark field beyond, calling still louder. Still there was no response, so she returned to the cottage.

“He’s made off, safe enough. You get your supper, and I will go to mother and settle her mind, or never a wink of sleep will she get this night.”

John Atkins obeyed, and began to eat heartily.

“Jacob is fast asleep. Look after Pattie,” she said, as, donning her straw bonnet, she stepped out into the gloomy night. A momentary horror of again meeting those eyes was overcome in her eager desire to set a mother’s heart at rest. On opening the gate, which prevented egress to stray animals from the common into the wood beyond, Mrs. Atkins found herself on a small piece of waste land, where the youths of the village found recreation.

It was now silent enough. The woman shuddered, all around was so dark and lonesome, and the road was long and dreary. At the green, she was met by a sudden gust of wind. There

was always a breeze on the common, summer or winter, and this dull autumn day it had blown chilly. The woman met no one as she hurried along. The poor children of toil are only too glad to get early to bed, to rest their wearied limbs, after long hours of continuous labour.

On reaching the "White Hart," she heard sounds of shouting and revelry, which struck painfully on her overstrung nerves. Presently she reached the high wall surrounding the secluded grounds of the Hall. Above this wall, dark branches pierced into the night, while withered leaves fell one by one, and carpeted the well-worn path.

With a passing thought of the wealth and luxury of the inmates of that ancient capacious building, she hurried on.

Exactly opposite the massive gates of the Hall was a small provision-shop, at the door of which stood its occupant, Mrs. Earnshaw, with arms wrapped in her white apron.

"Well, I never! Wherever are you off to at this time o' night? Have t' witches scared you out?"

"Not they. I'm none quite so soft as that; but I have a message from our John to his mother."

"Well, I don't mind walkin' down wi' you a bit. It must be lonesome by yoursen. Here, Charlie, you mind t' shop while I'm away."

Charlie, a mere lad, nodded assent, and just as they started, the massive but lesser gate of the Hall was heard to bang. They both turned, and recognised the tall figure of the Squire, hurrying along on the other side of the road.

"A bad man that!" said Mrs. Earnshaw, "fears neither God nor man."

"Surely, he's not *all* bad," replied Mrs. Atkins.

He was evidently going the same way as they were. They passed the picturesque lane where the trees met overhead, leading to some coal-pits. They paused by the churchyard wall, in which stood a handsome, square-towered church, and proceeded down the broad turnpike road, leading to the huge ironworks, where most of the cash was made that supported the whole neighbourhood.

"He's a gallivanting somewhere," said Mrs. Earnshaw, as the Squire, far ahead of them, disappeared from sight.

"After t' poachers, maybe," replied Mrs. Atkins.

"They say as how your Joe has joined that lot."

"Lor bless yer—*they* say, what won't folks say?" returned Mrs. Atkins, prudently.

"If ever he's taken, I guess your John will lose his place."

"Why? that *would* be hard, for how could John help it, whatever Joe does? The Squire ain't that cruel."

On reaching a narrow lane, branching off to workmen's cottages, Mrs. Earnshaw turned back, while Mrs. Atkins proceeded to a low thatched cottage, and stood at the closed, black-painted door, and listened. The wooden shutters were closed; but through the crevices she could discern a light within.

She looked up to the starless sky, all aglow from the flames of the numerous blast furnaces. She looked down on rows and rows of monotonous

dwellings beneath, and sighed. Then she raised the latch and entered.

Everything was in order in that humble dwelling. A bright fire burnt in the grate, before which an elderly man of peculiar physique sat dozing.

He was a well-washed collier. Upon a line across the mantelpiece were suspended his pit clothes, consisting of coarse blue flannel. His figure was thin and short; a few gray locks partially covered a long, narrow head. His eyes were remarkably close together, as if contracted by constant watchings for dangers ahead; his nose, extremely narrow between the eyes, was of tremendous proportions towards the end; his mouth, underneath a long lip, was wide, and marvellously ugly without being ill-tempered. A long clay pipe reposed on the top of the brightly-polished oven.

A bright, comely woman, as good-looking as he was ugly, came down the ladder-like stairs, bearing a dip-candle in her hand.

"Lor, Liza, where have you come from?" she exclaimed on seeing her daughter-in-law.

"Has Joe come home?"

Here the old man started up.

"Joe! who wants Joe? He's safe in bed, isn't he, mother?"

"Yes, lass, he's all right."

"That's a good job. He scared me out of my life to-night. The gamekeeper was after him."

Old Bob Atkins laughed.

"He is too sharp for 'em, is our Joe, he'll take some catching, he will, but I wish for goodness he'd gi'e up that game. T' Squire 'spects him, I'm sure, and it'll go bad for our John if he's found out. But he brought note home with him, not so much as a twopenny rabbit."

"Oh, I dare say it's only for the lark of it young lads court danger," said their daughter-in-law.

"Now our John niver did, niver. He keeps to t' narrow path, he does, and it isn't his fault as 'ow Joe likes a wide 'un. It's wonderful t' difference atween them two lads."

"Thank God there is," replied Liza, for it angered her to know how this elderly couple

almost preferred the scapegrace to the respectable John.

But it was getting late, and, after a few remarks, Mrs. John Atkins returned to her family, meeting no one on her lonely path homewards.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was another woman pacing backwards and forwards long after midnight ten years later in Broughton village—ready to wring her hands and tear her hair. A pale-faced, pale-haired, pale-eyed, and somewhat pale-souled woman, whose husband had years back been called what he really was, a “bad man.”

MRS. Hoxton loved him, however; the very neglect, that agitated her more than ever she had been agitated in her life, did but strengthen the passion that nothing else had ever roused in that usually imperturbable breast. In the whole county a handsomer man could not be found; and the beautiful casket had attracted her eye with such infatuation that when she found it contained but a worthless brilliant instead of the diamond she

had imagined, she still admired the casket and doted on it.

Squire Hoxton cared nothing for her admiration. She had wearied him beyond endurance long before he married her—nay, he had never cared a straw for her personally; but she was a lady of family and means. His pedigree was long enough; but his means had dwindled and dwindled, through reckless extravagance and with lack of business capability, until ruin stared him in the face. So he married money. He had no scruples about the wrong he did a woman who was willing to give so much, because she believed he loved her. She was an insipid bore to him. Her quiet composure, her simple acquiescence to all his remarks or suggestions, irritated him beyond expression. Her manners, her person, and even her purse, became intolerable. He almost hated her because the money was *hers* and not *his*, though he had not the slightest compunction about the spending of it for his own gratification.

“My goodness!” he ejaculated, mentally, “I’ve paid my price, the devil knows.”

Squire Hoxton never said “God knows.” In

his heart of hearts he hoped there was no God to know, and if there were—well, *if*—there was an *if* in his mind, and by that he would live.

Mrs. Hoxton believed all her parents had believed before her—never for a moment questioned any dogma or doctrine that in early years had been duly instilled into her mind; but her belief was merely tacit, without mental effort of any kind. Religion was a matter about which she troubled herself very little. She went to church, she sent her servants, she gave subscriptions, she invited the clergy to dinner, occasionally she paid a visit to the schools, and, for decency's sake, the Squire went to church too; nay, of the two, he enjoyed the change of scene most, the sight of the village worthies there assembled amused him; he quietly criticised everybody, the old parson with his skull-cap, his daughters in the church, the clerk in his box, the farmers, the village choir in the gallery behind him, at which he turned round and gazed with most unabashed impertinence. There were some pretty girls in the choir, and he liked to make them titter or blush—he preferred the blush. If Mrs. Hoxton noticed such proceedings she was far

too much infatuated, and stood too much in fear of her good-for-nothing tyrant to remonstrate as they walked home from church together, their only child, a girl of about six years of age, for whom the Squire entertained but little love, often by their side. The child was fair like her mother, with large gray eyes and curly hair; at the same time she had a double portion of her father's intelligence, and none of her mother's weakness. She was a curious child, and made the Squire laugh in spite of himself by her extraordinary remarks, for ever seeking out the "why of the why."

He had desired a son, and he would not forgive the impertinent girl who came in the stead of an heir. She seemed to belong to no one; for the mother, finding the child so unwelcome to her husband, cared but little for her, and ceaselessly wished she had been a boy.

Unloved, uncared for by either parent, the child grew up the darling of the servants, the pet of the village. That night Mrs. Hoxton continued for hours pacing backwards and forwards, anxiously awaiting her husband's return. She had heard him

go out, and wondered whither he had wended his steps. She would not have made an inquiry from any but him for the world. She did not feel well—she never felt well; life was full of *ennui* and sadness to her, her heart was heavy, and her head drooped languidly. Oh, if he would only come back and care for her as she cared for him. If he would only give her the smiles he bestowed on almost every other woman she would have been grateful. At last she heard the key in the door turn slowly. It was a strong, heavy lock. She opened her bedroom door and stood on the landing with a candle.

Squire Hoxton never noticed her, he struck a match and went into the dining-room. She heard him open the drawer in the sideboard containing spirits. She listened while he poked up the dying embers impatiently, then, hearing by the sound that he was irritable, she hesitated what to do next? Should she go downstairs or return to her room? She could not decide at first. She returned to her room for a few moments and waited; then she stole out again and listened—all was quite silent. Perhaps he would fall asleep and

wake up cold and be, oh, so cross ! She crept down in the dark, reached the dining-room door, and entered. The Squire was fast asleep, a candle burnt on the mantelpiece in front of the looking-glass, and by its dim light she could see that he looked white, nay, she fancied ill.

“Philip, won’t you come to bed ?” she said, touching him gently on the arm. “Are you hurt ?”

Philip Hoxton often pretended that he had been out in search of poachers during his nightly excursions when he had not, and his wife was always fearing some mishap from such adventures.

Her touch roused him.

“Confound you !” he exclaimed, angrily. “Why can’t you let me alone, creeping about like something uncanny ; why arn’t you in bed ?”

“Oh, Philip ! when you are away I feel so anxious.”

“So fiddlesticks ! Do you think a man six feet high, with strength of arm and nerve to wrestle with a Hercules, could not tackle these poor bandy-legged poachers ? Half-a-dozen at once I should say. But come, you are losing every sign of good looks with your absurd watchings.”

He stretched himself, rose, faced her with a peculiar look on his face, and spoke unusually gently.

"You are not well, Clara. You must leave home for a while. I insist upon your remaining in bed to-morrow."

Was he going to care for her at last? Oh, for the fond imagination to prove a reality.

"I am not ill, dear," she answered, drawing nearer.

He averted a caress, but made an effort to speak soothingly.

"No, not ill. I said not well—you are not well. I shall send you to the South of France till the winter is past. This beastly English climate is only fit for horses and peasants."

"Will you come too?" she inquired.

"Of course I shall take you there and leave you. Probably fetch you back again, if you carry out my wishes."

"Do I ever refuse to obey you?" she asked, quietly.

"Did I say you did?" Alas, this calm obedience was in reality one of the most irritating things

about her to him. "But, Clara," he added, "I may demand something of you that you would deny. If ever I do, and you are obstinate, I give you fair warning that we part."

"Oh, Philip! how can you say anything so shocking? You don't express much love for me now; but we can never part—never, never, till death."

"That depends, as I say, that depends on you."

"I shall never be obstinate with you, Philip."

"That remains to be seen; but we will say no more about it now. Come, it is long past midnight."

So they went together up the dark oaken staircase, and neither of them looked in the room where lay, in a small iron bedstead, their only, unloved child. Mrs. Hoxton lay awake till broad daylight, thinking of the strange visit to the South of France, and of the request her husband was about to make, which, he seemed to anticipate, would be denied. And she came to the inevitable conclusion that she would deny him nothing. After that she fell asleep, soothed by her determination that they should not part through any fault of hers.

Squire Hoxton tossed and tumbled restlessly; and, in spite of his midnight wanderings, was up at eight, when the bell sounded to summon the household to prayers. These the Squire never omitted, for he read with expression, and liked to hear himself. Besides, he liked to see the goodly array of servants. There was Jones the butler, as much like a parson, in his black livery and white choker, as possible. He invariably stood holding the handle of the door as the rest followed, the most conspicuous being Bolton the cook, a tall, wiry, muscular female, with strongly-marked features, always dressed in a stuff gown, and a black instead of a white cap. There was generally an air of independence and defiance in her manner, and when put out, no power on earth would induce her to join the family gathering. The only other servant worthy of note was nurse, a delicate-looking creature, with hair as white as snow, and a face remarkably youthful, though sad.

Sometimes little Miss Gerrie would be down in time for the service; but she invariably regretted having to endure the infliction, so it was not often the case. Of course she was too

young to listen, and as soon as the servants had stood motionless in a row for a minute, and sat down simultaneously, her interest in the affair immediately died out.

That morning Gerrie was absent, and the prayers were short. The Squire was eating his bacon when the door opened and the child appeared. She was not remarkably timid; her father's coldness or short rebuffs did not take much effect upon her. She went up to him and kissed him, as he turned over his papers.

"I don't want another doll, pa," she began.

"Who said you did?" he answered.

"Well, but I don't—stupid things. I shall take my little hammer to-day and break Judy all up."

"You will do no such thing, imp, because your mother will have the expense of buying another."

"No, she won't. I hate dolls; they can't cry, nor talk, nor laugh, and ain't one atom of good."

"Well, some little good girls love their dolls, talk to them, and cry over them like good little mothers. What makes you so different? Give it away to Laura Jewel."

Laura Jewel was the youngest daughter of the Rector of Broughton, and Laura was Gerrie's *bête noire*.

"Oh, no, she shan't have my doll. She has got everything she wants. May I give it to Pattie Atkins?"

Pattie Atkins was the child of the gardener, who possessed very few of this world's goods.

"Give it to whom you like, only never ask for another; and don't chatter any more, but get your breakfast."

This Gerrie was doing in a very listless way, for she had already been feasted with hot tea and buttered toast by the housemaid, who had waited on her mother. Her bread and milk seemed tasteless after it, and she played with it instead of eating it. Soon she jumped down from her seat and went to the long, low, mullioned window, which opened on to the lawn. The outlook was not inviting. The sky was gray, and the grass looked coldly green and wet. The trees were fast shedding their leaves, which bestrewed the gravelled paths. Gerrie sighed.

"Well, what's the matter now?" asked her

father, rising from his seat, and answering her sigh with one still deeper.

"It's wet," she said.

"Well, we can't help that. If it were never wet, we should have no flowers or fruit, little goose. What *do* you want, child?"

"Some one to play with me. I would give them all my toys. Oh, papa, may Pattie come?"

"Pattie! Why Pattie? Common, dirty little brat! Don't you understand yet that you are a lady, and Pattie is not?"

"What makes me a lady?" asked Gerrie, thoughtfully, "because I wish I wasn't."

"I make you a lady, and so does your mother. We clothe you nicely, feed you, teach you, have you kept clean; and some day you will know all about it."

"I don't want to know, papa. Am I one of Pattie's betters? because she keeps saying 'Miss' to me, and curtsies when she first sees me, and I would rather kiss her."

"Kiss her! Kiss Pattie Atkins! What on earth makes you care for Pattie so much?"

“Because she is so good, ever so much better than me.”

“Well, don’t you do it again, Gerrie; I will not allow my daughter to kiss my gardener’s daughter. What’s to be done with you I don’t know, you obstreperous mite! Go to your mother; I am going out.”

So saying, father and daughter passed into the large square hall, where the antlered heads looked down on the solitary child as she tried to amuse herself. She had a fine horse and cart, in which she put a dozen marbles. She was fertile enough in imagination; to each marble she gave a name, and fancied them a cart full of Sunday-school children; the prettiest alley was called Pattie. She imagined a glorious future for these queer children of her imagination, as she drew them about in her cart, or rolled them along the cocoanut-matting. But, save for her own short ejaculations, the silence was intense. Oh for Pattie! That was the one longing of the desolate little heart. And the longing for sweet human sympathy and fellowship grew deeper and deeper, till she felt she must obey the impulse that bade her go and seek her

favourite companion. She had a white pinafore on, over a pretty blue cashmere dress. There was nothing in the hall but her father's coats and hats, and she dare not venture to go upstairs to fetch anything lest she should be prevented from carrying out her project; so she opened the big hall door cautiously—how heavy it seemed—and then ran lightly down the path that led to a side gate. This opened easily, and the child found herself in the farm-yard of a house known by the appellation “Hall Farm.” It was a red-brick, substantial house, and its clean, flag-stoned kitchen, with its bright grate and glowing fire, its walls, yellow-washed, partially covered by utensils bright as mirrors, its huge dresser, upon which rested brown bowls of delicious milk, was to Gerrie one of the sweetest spots on earth—not the sweetest—that was the little cottage, ivy-grown, opening into the same large yard, in which dwelt her little goddess, Pattie Atkins. Thither her little feet led her, and she timidly knocked at the door.

It was opened by Pattie.

“Oh, Miss Gerrie, Miss Gerrie, come in! You do look cold!”

It, too, was a clean little kitchen, with sanded floor and bright fire. Pattie had a baby in her arms. Gerrie drew near the fire shivering.

"Shut the door, Pattie, because I have come of my own accord, and no one must tell—you won't? Papa will be cross; but I love you, Pattie, oh, so much, and I love your kitchen, and your mother and baby too, and I want to stop with you, but I mustn't."

"Bless your pretty face!" said Mrs. Atkins as she emerged from the back kitchen, where she had heard every word, "it's lonesome for you in the fine Hall, ain't it, dearie? And so you have come to our humble spot. But, oh, if the Squire forbids you, whatever must we do?"

"You must hide me under the table if he comes, won't you, Pattie? And just let me hold baby a minute, it isn't a bit bigger than my dollie."

They fetched a low, wooden milking-stool, and let the beautifully-dressed little damsel sit down and try for the first time to hold a "live doll."

She took to the business very naturally, and

when Pattie clapped her hands to the infant and made it laugh, Gerrie's delight was unbounded.

"Oh, how nice to have a live doll instead of a dead one—wouldn't you rather, Pattie?"

But Pattie loved a dead doll with long flaxen hair and blue eyes, though she did love the baby; but the doll was playing at work and the baby made work without much play.

"I am going to give you my doll, Pattie. I hate it, and in return I can come and nurse baby, can't I?"

When the baby became unmanageable on that strange little lap and began to make mighty objections to its nurse, Gerrie was sorely distressed, and was quite glad for the mother to come and hush its cries.

"I didn't hurt it," she said, humbly.

"No, bless you, but it's cutting its teeth."

Cutting its teeth? Oh, how queer! What could that mean?

The good woman explained, and then Gerrie was more angry than ever because her doll could not open its mouth, and could never have any teeth to cut. When it was quiet again Pattie

nursed it, and Mrs. Atkins sat down with a dish of potatoes and peeled them. Gerrie looked on the interesting proceedings with amusement, and thought such occupation much pleasanter than learning to read or to play her notes. Time passed quickly, and when she heard her father in the yard she immediately collapsed under the wooden table.

The clock struck twelve, a tall, old-fashioned clock, at which Gerrie gazed from under her safe retreat. Very soon after the door opened and Pattie's brother Jacob came in from school, a boy with brilliant black eyes but a decidedly turned-up nose. Gerrie was frightened, she did not know him and was unaccustomed to boys, so she remained as quiet as a mouse, while Pattie made mouths to her brother to let him know some one was there. He spied her bright blue frock and felt in his turn more nervous than she. He whispered to his mother, and his mother whispered to him. And then they set their humble dinner on the table, for the boy was hungry; and Gerrie instinctively felt she must go, and not intrude her little person on their privacy. She crept

out, looked shyly at the tall, handsome lad, and whispered softly :

“I’ll go now, please.”

“So you shall, Miss Gerrie; Jacob shall go and let you out of the gate, and we are honoured indeed by such a visit.”

“I want to kiss you, Pattie,” she whispered, “but papa said I mustn’t; I’m so sorry.”

“So am I, Miss Gerrie; but you are so much better than me. It isn’t likely as you should kiss the likes of me, though I shouldn’t hurt you.”

“No, indeed you wouldn’t, but ma says it isn’t proper; and I have to learn all about what is proper when I grow up. Good-bye, dear Pattie.” And away she ran out into the cold air, without hat or jacket, followed by Jacob’s slower footsteps; and she had to wait, shivering, while he fumbled with the lock, that he might have a good look at the queer little lady.

“Thank you,” she said, prettily, turning round. “I will give you a penny another time.”

“Don’t want one,” answered the boy.

“Tell Pattie I’ll come again,” said Gerrie;

"and please don't bang the gate. It's so nice to nurse the baby and see Pattie."

"I'll tell her, miss," answered Jacob; and he shut the gate very softly, while the little maiden ran round to the back entrance, and immediately found herself in front of a roaring fire; while the delicious smell of a roasting joint, that Bolton was basting vigorously, pervaded the atmosphere.

Gerrie was thoughtful.

"Pattie's mother had no joint roasting at her fire," she said.

"Oh, Miss Gerrie, Miss Gerrie, then it's there where you've been. Nurse has been seeking you everywhere."

"What for?"

"Well, you are going away with your ma, to France, at the end of the week; and you're going to have some new frocks."

"Am I? Poor ma! will it make her well?"

"Poor ma, yes, poor ma, indeed! She don't study you much; but she has her troubles. And you're as blue as a berry wi' cold. Are you hungry too, my pretty?"

"No, Bolton, dear, but sit down and take me on your lap."

And Bolton bent her stiff form and did as she was desired. Gerrie was cuddled up in her thin arms, and looked with curiosity at her iron-gray prim curls, parted with a comb at the side of her high cheek bones, and at the black cap, which surmounted them, brilliant with scarlet ribbon.

"What shall we do in France, Bolton, dear? Are you going?"

"Me! no, love. I'm going to stay and look after your pa."

"Ah, I forgot poor papa. Isn't he going?"

"He'll take you, but I guess he won't stop long. The house will be lonesome without you. I've looked after yer ever sin you were born, Miss Gerrie, darling; and I can't abide yer going to foreign parts."

Gerrie was warm now and wondering, and cook kissed her, and put her down, while she served the dinner up. For a few minutes Gerrie watched her, and then slowly left the kitchen to find nurse distractedly looking for her all over the great, half-inhabited house.

"Here I am, nurse, dear!" she exclaimed. "I've only been to see Pattie; you won't be cross, will you?"

"Oh, Miss Gerrie, Miss Gerrie, you'll be getting me into trouble if you do so; and I shall be sent away from you altogether."

"No, you shan't, you shan't!" answered the child, passionately; "I will be good, don't tell ma."

And nurse kissed and hugged her, and promised not to divulge the secret, as she made the child presentable for the sumptuous midday meal.

CHAPTER III.

GERRIE was destined not to go to France. When nurse called her the next morning, the child was listless, and though wide awake, unwilling to rise. Her slightest whim was attended to by this faithful attendant.

“Will you have your breakfast in bed, missie?”

“Please, nursie, dear;” but when the breakfast came, Gerrie could do no more than taste it.

Nurse was alarmed, and went to her mistress with the intelligence. Mrs. Hoxton was not alarmed; her heart was only capable of one passionate attachment, one absorbing care.

“Oh, you are so fanciful, nurse. Miss Gerrie is only sleepy, let her alone, she’ll get up soon. Help me to dress, for I should like to be at prayers the next few days before I go away.”

She hoped it would please Philip Hoxton to see her down, and for her to hear him read, especially as she meant to be particularly flattering to him, and endeavour to ingratiate herself in his favour. She had scarcely another thought than her graceless husband; but it did not please him a bit to see her sitting there, nor did her outspoken admiration of his beautiful intonation add one iota to his self-satisfaction. Her opinion was supremely indifferent to him, and hearing her intention of being present the following morning at the daily service, he resolved that he would absent himself.

"Where's Gerrie?" he inquired, at the breakfast table.

"She is sleepy this morning," was the answer.

"The queerest child I ever met," he answered; "she will give us no end of trouble, I'll guarantee, some of these days."

"She is not unaffectionate, I am sure," replied his wife.

"I did not say she was," was the laconic reply, "poor little mite! She does not receive over much from you or me; but I shall miss her

comical questions while you are away. She would have made a fine boy."

At dinner time Gerrie was again absent. She had got up, but was unusually drowsy, and when her mother visited the nursery, she found her fast asleep on nurse's lap.

But the child made no complaint when she was awake, so the mother, unaccustomed to childish ailments, took no alarm. The Squire, however, was annoyed, and after dinner made an unusual visit to the nursery.

"What's the matter, little queerstick?" he asked, not unkindly, as she still sat on nurse's lap.

"Nothing, pa, only I am tired."

"Tired, eh? Shall I fetch Dr. Butt to rouse you up?"

"Yes, pa, I do like Dr. Butt ever so much."

He laughed.

"And Dr. Jewel, to pray with you, eh?"

"No, I don't like him in his skull-cap and those spectacles. I like Regie, but he is ever such a long way off; and I like Jessie, but she's away, too."

"If you do not be quick and come down, I shall send for both doctors, skull-cap and spectacles."

Gerrie looked admiringly at her handsome father. The child loved him.

"Nurse me!" she whispered.

"Me! no, nonsense. There, I'll kiss you if you promise to get up and come down to tea. You are going to France at the end of the week, so make haste."

"Over the sea?"

"Yes, over the sea in a beautiful steam-boat."

"I don't like the sea, it's cold and cruel."

"Pooh, nonsense!" He kissed her, and went away.

Gerrie was soon asleep again, and put to bed; but when she woke, persisted in going down to tea to please her father. However, she burst out crying at the tea-table, and said she could not eat.

Nurse was summoned, the child dismissed, and with some anxiety, the gardener was hastily sent for Dr. Butt.

On his arrival, he pronounced Gerrie to be

suffering from cold, how caught was kept as a secret by her friends. The day following she was worse, inflammation of the lungs had set in, and Gerrie lay helplessly ill. Every day she got worse, became delirious, and her life was despaired of. Squire Hoxton was distracted. All his plans seemed upset. He declared it was imperative that they should start for Mentone at once, that very week. It was only to his wife he said this, at the same time declaring that her health required the change. And yet the doctor was not consulted concerning his wife at all, not even when attending the child, and the servants made their comments; for, with all their virtues, servants are human, and will talk and speculate, if they do so with less gravity of reason than their superiors.

But Mrs. Hoxton, in spite of her infatuation for the Squire, had a mother's instinct, and would not go until Gerrie was out of danger. Her anxiety was alleviated by the insatiable curiosity to know the object of this journey. The state of her own health she knew to be a farce, try as she might to flatter herself that it actuated her husband's movements in the smallest degree.

Another thing puzzled her. Nurse was not going with them, it was never intended she should. Gerrie's illness made it now impossible for her to be left by her faithful attendant. Who, then, was to be her companion on this mysterious journey?

"I have appointed an interview with a professional nurse in town," said her husband, "who has been highly recommended; and, no doubt, you will like her much."

"But I am not so ill as to require a nurse," remonstrated his wife.

"Oh, it is better you should have some companion; and later on, when Gerrie is better, her services will surely be required."

And Gerrie was slowly coming back to life. As soon as decent, father and mother left the little invalid and took their proposed journey.

Gerrie cried quietly when they had bidden her good-bye, and were fairly gone out of the house; but nurse felt relieved, and Bolton promised herself a week or two's holiday. These were clover days to the domestics. They sat over their meals, they jested and surmised, they talked over their

grievances, they nursed and petted their dear little invalid, and even indulged her so much as to allow Pattie Atkins to come and amuse her, saying to each other that, after all, they were the "same flesh and blood."

As for Pattie, she felt full of awe within the walls of that old-fashioned mansion, and had no sentiment of equality in her heart towards the rich little lady, who condescended to be fond of her. To her ignorant mind, the rich carpets, the costly furniture, the beautiful clothing of the child of wealth, made her infinitely her superior.

As a rule, the children of toil and poverty, with minds darkened by ignorance, and custom inuring them to personal disrespect, are quite unconscious that they have the same faculties as their more fortunate fellow-creatures. They do not even understand the equalities that God has given, though some of them are so fond of asserting their independence, and of declaring that they are all of the same flesh and blood. They are born in ignorance and kept in ignorance. All they want, all we all want is light, more light to show us what we are and what we might become.

Cultured people are not incognisant of their own possibilities — the uneducated are entirely, and when the educated foster this ignorance, it is most deplorable.

Pattie stood by Gerrie's bedside, too shy to speak.

Gerrie put out her thin, hot little hand, and clasped Pattie's.

"Oh, Pattie, dear, how kind of you to come. Have you brought your live doll?"

Pattie quite forgot what the child meant.

"I haven't brought nothing," she answered.

"Your baby, I meant."

A look of intelligence lit up Pattie's sweet countenance, for she was a beautiful girl, though utterly unconscious of it. Her hair was very dark, and grew low on a broad brow, her eyes were wondrously large and dark, while her features were perfectly classic. Her face was no contradiction to her character. For though Pattie thought a great deal of fine clothes, and loved gifts more than admiration, she was thoroughly honest and truthful, and had much affection for Miss Gerrie. Naturally, the anticipated delight of

receiving a beautiful doll from the little lady decidedly deepened this attachment. She remembered that promise, and looked round the room for a glimpse of the doll. There was a lady's rocking-horse in one corner of the room which attracted her attention. Gerrie watched her as she riveted her gaze upon it.

"That is my rocking-horse, Pattie. Can you ride?"

"No, miss, I durstn't. Please, miss, where's that doll?"

"I don't know. I don't care for it. I prayed to God one night that it might talk in the morning. Oh! I prayed so, so hard; but when I got up it sat just as stupid as ever, and—and so God does not always hear our prayers, Pattie, after all, and I put dolly away. Papa would not let me break it up, and I have been very, very ill since, so I don't know where things are now."

Pattie listened attentively. She was very sorry Miss Gerrie was so ill; but, oh, she did want the doll.

"Will you sit by me, Pattie, and talk to me?"

Pattie sat down, but did not know what to say at first.

"That there picter is your ma, ain't it, Miss Gerrie?"

"Oh, yes; reach it down and let me look at it. Poor ma is gone a long, long way. If she were here, I could not have you, for ma says it isn't proper for me to 'sociate with a gardener's daughter, she can't love me as her little girl if I do. But she isn't here now, so it doesn't matter, and I've no one else."

"Yer ma *is* a grand lady; my! when she comes i' t' school, Miss Yates does make a to do."

"Does she? How?"

"She *calls* any of us as hadn't clean pinnars on, or us hairs untidy, and keeps us in sometimes."

"Does mamma scold you for it too?"

"Never! She calls us good childer, and looks fair beautiful. Them there silks she wears do set her off, don't they?"

"I don't know; I don't care what mamma wears at all. I don't care for frocks, do you, Pattie?"

Pattie's eyes glittered. She laughed.

"My! shouldn't I like to be dressed foine and be a lady, to live in a big house like this, and wear gold ear-rings. It's them things as make all th' difference atween you and me."

Gerrie thought and wondered. Was it really all these things that made the only difference between her and Pattie, between her mother, the Squire's wife, and Pattie's mother, buxom Mrs. Atkins?

"Pattie," she said at last, "I don't think it is; there must be something else."

"Well, of course; your mamma never does note, and you'll never have to soil your hands, while we work all along and are at it from morning till night."

"Poor Pattie!" said gentle Gerrie, "there are such a lot of differences; and yet you and I are both little girls, and you are ever so much prettier than me."

"Me, Miss Gerrie! I know I ain't—I ain't pretty at all. Mother calls me a gipsy, I'se so dark-skinned."

And Pattie looked down at her dark, coarse

hands, and compared them with the delicate, blue-veined ones of the little invalid, with the white embroidered cuffs above them, and almost shivered at the contrast.

"What foul hands I've got," she said, quite reproachfully. "I wonder if ever yourn could look like them, if you had to do hard work like me."

"I don't know," said Gerrie, gazing without a particle of vanity at her lily-white hands. "But never mind your hands; can you read, Pattie?"

"A bit. I don't care note about it. We read i' t' Testament at school; but I rarely go now, for I have to mind the baby."

"Don't you read story-books? Can't you tell me a story?"

"I knows note but what goes off in Broughton. Our Jacob's school-mate, as used to be, has been working down i' t' pit and 'as got his leg broke, and our Jacob has trapped his toe, and t' doctor thinks it'll have to come off."

"Oh, poor boy! Who blows the organ now, then?"

“That I can’t tell yer, miss, nor who’ll pull the passing-bell for Mester Bingham, now our Jacob can’t. He were always so handy. He’ll be all right in a bit. Hadn’t Bolton telled yer about Jacob?”

“No, she only came in a minute this morning, dear old Bolton. She is so good to me, and makes me all sorts of nice things, but I can’t eat them. Are you hungry, Pattie?”

“No, Miss Gerrie; but I could eat summat good.”

So Gerrie bade her ring the bell, and in a few minutes nurse obeyed the summons, and hearing that Gerrie wanted something nice to eat, hastened away to procure all the delicacies imaginable.

Pattie sat down to a sumptuous tea, such a tea as she had never partaken of in her life before. There were cakes hot and cold, cream and delicious jam. Pattie did justice to everything, and little Gerrie’s cheeks burnt, and her eyes glowed with pleasurable excitement to see how much her little friend enjoyed the meal, she

for whom it was all intended barely tasting anything.

Nurse laughed, and after Pattie was gone, said :

“Well, I never! that child is blessed with an appetite.” Gerrie had ventured to give her a kiss, too, as well as her doll, quieting her conscience with the reflection that now she had no papa or mamma to kiss, it did not matter much, as they could not be contaminated.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTMAS came round as usual, waiting for no man. The season was delightful, clear, and frosty, with the white rime clinging to the trees and hedges, and crystal icicles hanging from the eaves of the houses and the branches of trees, the sun shining red and brilliantly at midday.

There were some happy gatherings in Broughton that year; but not at the Hall. The Squire had returned in the autumn, and found his little daughter becoming slowly convalescent. She welcomed him with unfeigned joy, but found him more than usually taciturn and morose. So the days passed gloomily to the lonely child, who was afraid to ask her father to allow her Pattie's companionship. And, alas, she desired no other.

Laura Jewel was several years older than Gerrie,

and felt it quite derogatory to her dignity to be on equal terms with her. Laura, though still in short frocks, was eagerly longing to discard them, and pinafores, too ; she wanted to be grown up like her elder sister Jessie. And when Jessie came home from school for the Christmas holidays, and heard how delicate Gerrie still was, and moreover how lonely, deprived of a mother's care, and left to the tender mercies of servants, she determined to befriend her, for Jessie's heart always longed to relieve distress in any form or shape.

She reproved her proud little sister for speaking with so little sympathy of their child friend.

"She is such a baby," said Laura, contemptuously.

"I always think her an uncommonly wise little woman," remarked Reginald, a youth of seventeen, who had also returned from a school where he acted as usher, and was contemplating taking Orders some future day.

"Gerrie thinks no one as nice as Pattie Atkins," laughed Laura.

"She *is* the prettiest girl in Broughton," exclaimed Arthur, the second son, who still attended

a neighbouring Grammar School, and who sometimes expressed a wish to go down the pits, to the horror of every member of the house. The Rectory already contained a skeleton in the shape of a deformed and imbecile eldest son. They all agreed that Pattie's face was beautiful, the expression innocent and charming; but Regie declared it to be unintellectual.

To this Arthur would not consent.

It was a fine ivy-grown old Rectory in which these young folks were gathered in the long, low dining-room. They had no secrets from each other as yet; so the conversation flowed on uninterruptedly for some time. Their father, Dr. Jewel, was one of the old school of clergymen, punctual in all church services, but very inactive in parish work. He felt himself superior to his people, and often declared that he was glad there was a large body of Dissenters in the country, who could speak the language suitable to the capacity of their hearers, which he could not attempt to do. He spent hours every day in his study, read a good deal, but originated very little. He might also be called lazy; but,

as an extenuation, we must say that he was in delicate health, suffering from chronic rheumatism, which at times prostrated him.

Dr. Jewel had married from expediency rather than from affection, and suffered accordingly from mental depression. Yet he and his wife had lived many years together on amiable terms. *His* first thought was his own health; *her* chief thought her children—though she gave him more than a fair amount of attention when suffering from one of his severe attacks. He was then very hard to please and taxed her patience immensely. Dr. Jewel was short, emaciated, bald, with a thick, dark beard. His eyes also were dark and dreamy.

His children stood somewhat in awe of him, for he was very sensitive and easy to take offence. His eldest son was a veritable thorn in the flesh to his proud father. He was more—he was an enigma, an astonishment. Such a phenomenon as an imbecile had never been known in his own family, or in that of his wife. And here was he, in delicate health, requiring a right hand in his parish work, and forced to see daily this apology for a son. It

was wormwood and gall, the bitterest drop in what he considered, even without that, a sufficiently bitter cup.

And yet his little world envied him, for the other children were such that any father might be proud of them. Reginald, the second son, possessed as fine a face as could anywhere be seen, and his intellectual powers were prodigious. He was tall and thin, with fair hair and complexion, without a tinge of gold or red. His features seemed chiselled in marble—his forehead was lofty and broad. When in repose there was an expression of sternness about him, but when he smiled, every feature, especially his deep violet eyes, lit up with a peculiar fascination, a fascination no one could resist but his parents, who were both unjust to this highly gifted son. He knew they did not understand him—nor did they. He was not the calculating, haughty character which they credited him to be. He was both passionately affectionate and grateful to those who understood him, and felt deeply, painfully conscious that his parents never did. He was not proud of his advantages over his unfortunate brother, nor did he foster any

contempt for him. He loved and tenderly cared for him, though he declared he needed no pity, not knowing that he was in any way pitiable. The consciousness is the trouble of all that, and this Dickie was spared. In his way, poor Dick was happy enough. Give him plenty of food, air, clothing, without thwarting him, and his days were cheerful and bright. He would count his own fingers over and over again for hours, laughing and chattering to himself meaninglessly to all the rest of the world. He would stroke his sisters' cheeks, saying, repeatedly, "Nicey, nicey!" He would play with cat or dog, and attempt to read and write. At meal times he would watch those who served, to see how they helped themselves, and if he discerned a tit-bit finding its way to that plate, would make most inappropriate remarks to the consternation of all at table. To reprove him at the time was all in vain, and equally fruitlessly were endeavours made to impress upon his weak mind a sense of better manners. Dick would continue to make painful allusions whenever they oppressed him.

Gerrie had desired to be friendly with poor

Dick; but one day he bit her unceremoniously when she objected to his counting her curls, and frightened as well as hurt her dreadfully. Gerrie was always happy with Jessie and Regie, and could tolerate Arthur's teasings, but not Laura's endeavours to be big. They were intolerable.

Poor, desolate child! Even Mrs. Jewel was sorry for her, and Mrs. Jewel's powers of sympathy were limited; but the absence of her mother, and her continued delicacy, aroused her tenderer feelings. She allowed Jessie to fetch her to the Rectory as often as she pleased, wrapped up well in furs and tippets, and Reginald would carry her home again in his strong arms, while she put her arms round his neck and thoroughly enjoyed the sensation of being thus cared for.

"Our house is too big, Regie, isn't it?" she said one night as they thus went along. "Why, we have lots of rooms of no use to anybody, and Mrs. Atkins' house isn't big enough. Why do they make some so much too big and some such a lot too little?"

"That's a puzzling question, puss," he replied. "When that old Hall of yours was first built,

there was no doubt plenty of people and things to fill it."

"And yours, too?"

"Yes. Ours is not much too large for us."

"But it is ever so much bigger than Mrs. Atkins'. Oh, don't you know how crowded they are? Pattie, and Betsey, and Ellen, all sleep in one bed; and Jacob, and George, and Joey, I don't know where they can be all put. It don't seem right somehow."

"Oh, those sort of people are used to such ways and means. They don't care; why should you?"

"But they do care. Pattie was telling me how hard it was for her to clean her bedroom floor because it was so crowded. How it made her poor back ache; and she has to do it every week, she says. I don't want her to do it."

"Your little head is full of Pattie. I wish you would think as much about me."

"I do think lots about you. You are going to be a clergyman like the Doctor, aren't you?"

"Yes, I hope so."

"And shall you grow bald and wear a little

round black cap, too, and talk ever such a long time in the pulpit?"

"I can't tell you that, Gerrie. I shall be obliged to talk when I get up there, you know; but I will try to be as short as I can whenever you are present."

"That's good of you. I never can tell a bit what your papa says. I like to hear nurse read best, and I can read myself ever so fast now."

"Well done! And now don't trouble your little head about the size of Pattie's bedroom."

They had reached the massive gates of the Hall, and Regie rang a bell for the lodgekeeper to open the smaller gate. This was done immediately, and the two entered the now gloomy-looking precincts.

Gerrie entreated her escort to come in with her and talk to her father. It was Christmas Eve, and the child found her own private Christmas tree, trimmed by the servants, waiting for her on the hall table. She capered round it with delight. It was laden with wax lights, toys, and fruit. Every servant, every poor child that dared, had contributed their small, simple gifts, and a splendidly-

bound volume of "Andersen's Tales" lay at the bottom, as a present from her father. Oh, if Pattie and her brothers and sisters might only come in and see the tree! She whispered her wish to Regie. They would be so pleased, she said. She knew they would. Did he think they might be sent for, it was only eight o'clock?

"Oh, where is papa?" she cried, impatiently.

Margery, the housemaid, who had opened the door, told her that he was in the library, whither she ran at full speed.

"Oh, thank you, dear papa, for your beautiful book. Oh, may Pattie and all of them come in and see my lovely tree? Regie will fetch them. Please say yes."

Her father frowned, and then laughed at her vehemence. He was lounging in an arm-chair, reading a French novel.

"Very well, only bring Regie in here with you when you come back."

Regie gratified his little favourite and hastened to the cottage, where he found the family assembled. Jacob was talking with some excitement, entreating his mother to let him go to the pits or to the

foundry when the New Year commenced, and his mother was fretting at the idea. He would be the first in her family that had been a collier. Reginald soon discovered the subject of debate, and gave his opinion that the life of a collier must be an unexceptionally brave one, and none more useful.

“Oh, but the dangers, sir, down them awful pits, and the bad language and the wicked ways of some of the men.”

“You must let your boy go and set a better example.”

“Yes, sir; but boys will be boys, and so easy led.”

No sooner, however, did Regie deliver his message than all faces brightened wonderfully. It would indeed be a treat to go to the Hall and see the young lady's Christmas tree.

In a few moments they were all scampering after him through the side gate and across the still freezing lawn. Some of them had never seen that wide, comfortable hall, and now so brilliantly lighted up, it looked to them like fairyland.

Gerrie soon distributed her sweetmeats and fruit, then chose for each a small present, reserving

the best for Pattie, who stood very quietly attentive, under Reginald's scrutiny. Arthur was not wrong; this Pattie Atkins had a face surpassing Gerrie's in beauty of feature. She was dressed in a coarse winsey short frock, neither decked with frill nor tucker; it was not even her best frock; her hair was very straight, and was cut just short enough to put behind her ears. She had a quiet, subdued expression, and looked almost with motherly interest on the distribution of gifts among her younger brothers and sisters, accepting her own with avidity. Regie tried to read her character; but her beautiful face indicated no peculiarities. He turned his eyes on the little giver. How every feature was lit up with pleasurable excitement, how her eyes glowed while she tasted the joy of being beneficent! and her expression changed every moment as she bestowed her little presents first on one and then on the other. Her face bespoke beautiful unselfishness and loving-kindness.

"The truest beauty lies in expression," thought Regie, "and Gerrie's has more of that than any face I ever saw." As soon as the wax lights

were almost burnt out, he told the children to retire ; then he accompanied Gerrie to the library, where he was heartily welcomed by the Squire.

Geraldine was intoxicated with a sense of her father's goodness, and hugged him in spite of remonstrance, as his head reclined just within reach of her little arms.

"Oh you dear, good papa ! the Atkins' will go to bed so happy that they will quite forget what a wee room they have to sleep in. Weren't they happy, Regie ? "

"Not so happy as some one else I know."

"You mean me—yes, so I was, so I am ; but to-morrow I shall be sad again, because there will be no one to play with me."

"Pooh, nonsense !" said her father, sharply. Then he added : "You will be happy by-and-by, when mamma comes back with a live doll."

"A live doll for me ? Oh, papa, papa ! "

"Yes, a live doll for you, and an expensive one for me."

Reginald smiled and congratulated the Squire, who replied :

"We must not count our chickens before they

are hatched, and please say nothing about it. I have spoken prematurely, but the child's melancholy remark took me by surprise."

He had scarcely finished his sentence when sounds of footsteps were heard outside, and the waits commenced to sing heartily an old-fashioned Christmas Carol.

"They have come early," said the Squire to Regie, "I suppose on purpose for Gerrie's benefit. We always have them in the hall, and regale them with spiced ale and mince-pies; then I slip a sovereign in the hand of the leader of them — old Joe Bannington, and dismiss them with a Happy New Year, mentally hoping they will not spend it on my preserves. That is my regular rôle, year after year."

"Very good of you, I am sure," said Regie, politely.

"Oh dear no, and they all think me a regular 'rogue.' You know that very well; but my shoulders are broad, my skin pretty thick, so their ill opinion matters little."

"You are not a regular rogue, pa. Is he, Regie?" cried the child, clinging to her father.

"I should just think not, indeed, after giving such treats."

"Please, sir, the singers is in the hall," said a woman's voice at the door.

So to the hall the Squire proceeded, followed by Gerrie and Reginald. There were about twenty of them, men, women, and boys, and they made the old wainscoting ring again with their hallelujahs. Their faces were comical enough, while they thus exercised their lungs. They stood in a circle, the leader, Joe Bannington, in their midst. Some shut their eyes, gazing inward; some opened them wide, gazing upward; one opened his mouth as if it would be impossible ever to close it again; another seemed afraid to open it at all. The trebles raised their chins, the basses drew them in as far as ever they could go. Gerrie gazed in wonder, the Squire's expression was immovable, Regie could scarcely conceal his amusement. The last Amen to the first part having ended, they were all congratulated, when a youth stepped forward and sang a solo. His voice was clear as a bell, and by no means badly modulated. He sang, too, with feeling, and Gerrie wanted to cry. He was a tall,

thin boy, with a very pale face, and very black hair and eyes. He seemed not the slightest disconcerted or abashed; either his self-control was great, or his indifference supreme. It was the first. When he had done he returned to his place quietly, while the Squire and Regie were loud in their praise. Then Reginald stepped forward and gave the youth half-a-crown. Jacob Atkins took it, thanked Mr. Regie politely and dropped the coin in his pocket. Gerrie whispered to her papa, and he nodded assent. Light as a little fairy, she tripped across the hall, and gave the boy a coin; his self-control left him entirely for a moment. He blushed crimson to the roots of his hair, took the sweetly offered new shilling, and murmured his thanks almost inarticulately. As she tripped back, his face resumed more than its usual pallor. Another and then another anthem followed, Jacob's clear treble heard distinctly above all the rest. The singing ended, they all partook of good cheer, to which they did ample credit. Warmed without and within, they concluded with a musical toast to their host. On that

one occasion he was always "a jolly good fellow," whatever he was at another time. Then they all rose to go, and the Squire congratulated himself that it was over. Reginald wanted to rejoin his sisters; but the Squire insisted that it was a greater charity to cheer his solitude, so the youth submitted, and they bid little Gerrie good night, who kissed them both with a very divided heart.

Reginald thought the Squire very restless, and wondered why he desired his company, except it were as a talking-machine, or, rather, a machine to be talked to. He walked up and down the room, and was evidently labouring under some concealed excitement. His mind dwelt on the mysterious. Those were the early days of clairvoyance, and the Squire was inclined to be superstitious.

He did not relish the idea that mind triumphs over matter. The thought of a spiritual unseen world around him was terrible. Why should people think so much, dreaming awake and asleep? Why should not man be merely an unaccountable animal, superior, but an animal only? Such a faith would bring comfort—could bring nothing else. It was

torture to believe that conscience would torment one through all eternity. He imagined he never acted but upon necessity. Self-control was nothing more nor less than feeble desires. It was not his fault that his passions were all intense, he did not make himself; the only difference between him and a saint was that one was a strong animal, the other a weak one. He did not like to be left to his thoughts, he wanted to think less; and, if he prayed for anything, *that* should be the substance of his petition.

Regie felt puzzled and uncomfortable when he returned home at midnight after that visit to the Hall.

CHAPTER V.

IN May there was quite a commotion in the village of Broughton at the unexpected intelligence that a son and heir had been born to the Squire at Mentone, and that as mother and child were doing well they might soon be expected home. This event was commented on near and far. There were rumours afloat, but the originators could never be found, so they were only mysteriously whispered and cogitated over in isolated minds. One feared lest the very walls should hear the breathing of them.

Gerrie was supremely happy, and every morning urged her father to take his trunk and fetch home her mother and the "live doll."

Bolton looked unutterable things; nurse was full of silent surmises; Jones, as ever, imperturbable.

The Squire, though loud in jubilant delight, had an expression of care on his face, and he hated, above all things, to meet Bolton anywhere, on the stairs or about the house, and was only gratified that she purposely absented herself from prayers.

So time passed. Towards the end of the month, the weather being exceptionally warm and bright, Philip Hoxton took his journey south to bring home wife and child.

Gerrie was kissed and petted, and cried over more than once by the mysterious Bolton.

"Ah, my precious lamb!" she exclaimed, "you have an old friend as loves you better than your own mother."

"No, Bolton, you don't. Ma does love me."

"In her way—but you'll be nothing now, love—nothing."

Gerrie asked nurse, who also looked ready to cry, if her mother did not love her.

"No one could help a-loving of you," was the answer. So Gerrie was comforted.

A little brother at last—all her own. How she could love him! And when he was big enough he

should have the rocking-horse, and marbles, and all and everything. He actually arrived at last. Gerrie stood in the old porch as the brougham drove up the broad, short avenue. How glorious everything looked to her under the bright rays of the early afternoon sun. The huge chestnuts, with their large green leaves, seemed to hold out loving arms to embrace her, the newly-budded roses perfumed the early summer air; her little dog Charlie rushed in and out of the shrubs, wagging his tail incessantly, and barking as loud as his wee lungs permitted. Gerrie was in the seventh heaven as her mother was handed out by the Squire, followed by a person in a peculiar garb, carrying what must really be the "live doll."

Her mother was dressed exquisitely, but looked pale and anxious. She clasped her little girl lovingly to her heart, and Gerrie felt that Bolton was a story-teller, her mother *did* love her. Then she was hastily kissed by her father, and timidly she asked him, "Is that my baby brother?"

"Yes, dear," replied the Sister, whose garb frightened the child too much to allow her to approach very near. She did not care to go to

her, not even to see the baby, until her own dear nursie had him safe. So she clung to her mother, and was quite glad to run and tell nursie that "mamma" wanted her. She found that individual dreadfully agitated, for with her was Bolton, with all her face twisted into unutterable disapprobation.

"Either that Roman Catholic may nurse him or me," said nursie. "We will not go shares. Why don't she dress like other folks? Will you have her for your new nursie, darling?"

"I should just think not, indeed," said Miss Gerrie. "I don't like her at all. She must go back again and leave us mamma and baby. But come, nursie dear, you are wanted, come with me."

So they went down the old, broad wainscoted staircase, hand in hand.

They found the party in the dining-room. Mrs. Hoxton lay back in an arm-chair, with such a look of intense weariness on her face, that nurse was alarmed. She stepped quickly up to her.

"Oh! my dear lady, won't you take a glass

of wine? Please, sir, look," for the lady seemed about to faint.

Gerrie ran to her mother, while the Squire exclaimed, "Loosen her dress," and himself brought a glass of wine from the sideboard, which he made her drink to the last drain.

Meanwhile, the Sister of Charity, as she appeared to be, hushed the fretful cries of the young son and heir, by pacing up and down with him. She seemed agitated herself, as if aware of the unfavourable impression she made.

The Squire was the first to address her, which he did in a loud, somewhat peremptory style.

"You would like to go upstairs, Miss Grey? Take the child to the nursery. Gerrie will lead you there."

Gerrie dared not disobey. She gave a timid glance at the face of the stranger; but was not drawn to it.

"This way, please," was all she said, and as soon as they reached the nursery door, she merely added, "In there, please," scampering back as fast as possible to people who looked more canny, in fact, she went straight to the kitchen.

She found cook sitting with her back to the window, her white apron over her head, quite forgetful of the dinner that was to be served at five o'clock. Jones was busy cleaning the silver, and said in a cheery voice from out his tiny pantry:

"There, Miss Gerrie! You *will* be set up with such a doll, shan't you now?"

Cook started.

"Bless my lamb! She may well love it," she cried, laconically.

"Yes, I shall; but what is that woman with it—a nun?"

"The Lord knows; but if she stays, I shall go."

"Shoo'll none eat you," ejaculated Jones.

"And I'll tak' care she don't have o'er much to eat hersen' that I have to get ready," said cook, sharply, rising with a jerk, and dashing the hot dripping over the roasting fowl. "I wish she may choke if I do."

"Oh, cook, don't say so; it's wicked."

"Wicked! I should like to know what ain't wicked in this house, save you and nurse."

"And mamma, and——"

"She's bad enough."

"How dare you say so? *you* are wicked, wicked, Bolton."

"Oh, I know that; but you should know who's yer friend."

"I *do*. Ma is, and nursie, and pa, and Jones, and baby brother will be, and you too, Bolton, dear, when you don't say that ma's bad and doesn't love me."

"Of course, I come last, and only then if I tells a lie."

And cook banged about in rather an unladylike manner, even for kitchen regions.

Seeing she was hurt and grieved about something, Gerrie went to kiss her, and having succeeded in procuring a hug, returned to the vacated dining-room.

Then she rushed upstairs, and never rested till nursie and she were alone together with the baby in the dear old nursery of her own babyhood.

"There, now let me have my little brother; put him on my knee, and I will sit on my cot, and we shall be so safe."

So there they were, the three of them, Gerrie on the bed holding the "live doll," and nurse looking on.

He was pronounced just like Pattie's baby, and questions were asked concerning his teeth.

They were talking confidentially, when, almost unheard, the nurse, or Sister, stood beside them. Divested of a part of her headgear, she looked more natural. Her black dress, and large white collar, Gerrie admired; but the huge black cross round her neck she looked upon as a badge of something highly superstitious or supernatural. The beads the child examined curiously, but was not sufficiently at home with her new acquaintance to ask any questions about them then.

"Won't you let nurse have baby, and come and talk to me?" asked the Sister, in a gentle voice.

"Not yet, please."

"Don't you like these beads? Come, and I will show you something else." She evidently wished to ingratiate herself, but Gerrie could not so easily be propitiated.

But Gerrie was by no means irreconcilable;

and before she went to sleep she kissed the strange Sister, and ventured to ask what the beads were for.

"To count, dear," was the short answer.

"Oh, wouldn't Dick like them to play with, he likes anything to count. He counted my curls one day, and I didn't like it."

"Who is Dickie?"

"He is a poor idiot boy. You were never like that, were you?"

"No, indeed! Why do you ask?"

"Because—oh, because you like something to count."

And Gerrie certainly regarded the beads as a toy for poor imbeciles.

One afternoon Sister Grey went to the neighbouring town and left the baby with nurse. Bolton had absented herself from the children's room ever since his arrival, but having received communication that the coast was clear, came to take a cup of tea with her old friends.

Mrs. Hoxton had returned a melancholy invalid, and spent most of the morning in her bedroom, and the rest of the day on her couch. The

presence of her children seemed but to deepen her sadness.

"Missis isn't altogether in clover now this precious lad *has* arrived," said Bolton. "She seems worse than ever, and I don't fancy she takes very kindly to Sister Grey. How do you get along with Sister now, Miss Gerrie?"

"She is kind to me, tells me stories, shows me pictures, and lets me play with baby."

"Then you're all right."

"Yes, Bolton, dear. It is ever so much nicer to have a baby."

"What about Pattie Atkins? Has she gone clean out of mind?"

"No, you know she hasn't; but Sister Grey keeps me with her so much, and won't have Pattie."

"And you like that?"

"No, I don't, naughty Bolton! I love Pattie; I want her always."

"But you love Sister Grey, too."

"Not much. Does ma love her?"

"You ask her, Miss Gerrie. There now, do."

"So I will. Does papa love her?"

"Lord love the child! Ask him, too."

"So I will," she replied. "Some one ought to love her, you know."

"That some one ain't me, anyhow," said Bolton, laughing disagreeably.

"Nor me," replied the nurse.

But Gerrie obstinately refused to add "Nor me," because to her it seemed cruel for them all to refuse to love Sister Grey.

Mrs. Hoxton still wore an unbending air of pride, though weary of soul and suffering in body. In her frame of mind every hour seemed eternally the same, sometimes her heaviness of heart was beyond her limited powers of endurance. She sighed deeply and unconsciously when in the presence of others, but when alone she would often sob aloud.

Her husband still exercised a marvellous ascendancy over her. She had much of which to complain, but she stifled her desire to reproach him, fearful of the result.

At first the baby boy seemed to be of absorbing interest to him; he even took him in his arms and examined him minutely, which, as

an infant, he had never condescended to do to Gerrie. But the interest languished by degrees, and he expressed abhorrence at hearing his puling cries.

Mrs. Hoxton appeared to care as little for this child as for her first. If she had anticipated much happiness in possession of a son and heir, it had not come.

Philip Hoxton's affection to her was in no measure deepened. He was as hopelessly restless as ever, and spent as much time away from home. Nay, more; for sometimes he was away for days and weeks together.

Sister Grey remained partly as governess to Gerrie, as a personal attendant on Mrs. Hoxton, or as upper nurse to the heir.

The other servants, finding her quiet and un-presuming, learnt to tolerate her; but with no one was she apparently a favourite. There was, perhaps, one good thing she did, and that was she almost totally separated the young lady from the gardener's daughter, and tried to impress a sense of social status on the mind of Gerrie. But to the little lady it seemed as cruel to be cold and

distant to poor children because they were ill clothed and ignorant, as it was to despise them for having no dinner when she had more than enough. It was altogether a mysterious fact this superiority, and she found it very difficult to reconcile it to her conscience that it was a justifiable one.

Gerrie seemed to have been born with an idea, and that was to trample down as much as in her lay the avoidable inequalities of life. Occasionally, however, she gave peculiar tokens that the frequent lessons on social propriety had some effect.

Nurse had a day's holiday—a rare occurrence. Sister Grey was occupied with the baby, and upon the housemaid rested the responsibility of hearing Miss Gerrie say her prayers for the night when putting her to bed.

Gerrie was on her dignity.

“Martha, you are only a servant, so I cannot say my prayers out loud to you as I do to nursie and Sister Grey.”

“Very well, miss, you can say them to yourself.”

"But I don't know the new one. It is in that book," and Gerrie fetched it.

"Well, then, Miss Gerrie, what will you do to say it after me?"

Gerrie looked very thoughtful.

"Oh, I know. You say a line, and I will whisper it, and when I've done I will say 'tick.' Won't that do?"

Martha smiled. People did not say "all right" in those days, but "very well," and "that'll do." So Martha said, "Very well, miss," and Gerrie proceeded to repeat her prayers in at least an original manner. Directly after she kissed Martha in the same way as she kissed her mother, without much demonstration.

Her verse of hymn was :

Not more than others I deserve,
Yet God has given me more;
For I have food while others starve,
And beg from door to door.

And long after Martha had departed the child lay awake, pondering over the lines, and trying to understand their meaning.

"Why did God give me this nice house, and everything I have got, and Pattie next to nothing? It wasn't fair." That was her invariable conclusion; if she had deserved more it might have been, but the hymn told her she did not. Her prayer was far from being, "God be merciful to me a sinner," for He had already been too merciful for her sense of justice. Her idea was: "Please make me try to feel that I am much better than Pattie, because I have so much more than she has."

But that logic did not satisfy her.

"Ah," she added to herself, "God gave it me for some good reason, and will want to know what I did with it all—oh, I know He will—and whatever shall I say?"

Gerrie never did anything good or bad without reasoning to herself. Her mother said she had always an excuse; and so she had, for she never acted without settling matters in her own mind. It was very tiresome to those who had the training of her young ideas, and often instead of explaining, they would say:

"You are only a silly little girl, and cannot understand such matters."

"Oughtn't rich people to be very kind?" she asked her father, one day when they were walking to church together.

"Ought stands for nought, Gerrie; but don't you think I am kind?"

"Yes, papa, to me."

"Yes, and to Atkins, Jones, and all the pack of them. Besides, child, I'm not rich. Can barely make both ends meet. But how you do argue and question, you little chit."

CHAPTER VI.

DR. JEWEL sat in his study ruminating. It was a warm summer's day, the window was wide open, the silence was only disturbed by the cawing of rooks outside, or the buzzing of a bee or wasp passing from flower to flower. All the surroundings were pleasant outside and within. The only unpleasant thing that would have attracted a stranger would have been the Doctor's face, with its sour expression of proud discontent.

The door had just closed upon the retreating figure of Arthur, his second son, a bright, genial youth, but of a most determined character. Unfortunately his obstinacy had come into opposition with that of his father; in that determination of character, he was a veritable chip of the old block.

Arthur had left school, where he had been captain for three years, covered with honours, bringing home many prizes, excellent reports, and an earnest wish from the master that he would try for the forthcoming Scholarship Examination for St. John's, Cambridge; and Arthur had point-blank refused.

This was the cause of his father's displeasure. In him the deeply-rooted sentiment of caste was predominant. The imbecility of his eldest son, at least, did not touch that. Dick, though an idiot, was a gentlemanly idiot; and, fortunately, could never disgrace himself by descending to a lower social scale.

Arthur had set his face like a flint against social distinctions; but not against natural, or rather God-made inequalities. His companions at school were of all classes, and he had picked and chosen those with whom he would associate, and those with whom he would not, either at school or in after life; but this had nothing whatever to do with their social status. He was not ultra-refined in manner, himself being full of animal spirits, truthful to bluntness, and fond

of all athletic sports. Physically, he was incompetent for a constant studious life; to exercise his limbs and his muscles was a necessity to him.

He was religious with his whole soul, though his father's doctrinal sermons sometimes drove him wild.

"You be a theorising Christian, and I will be a practical one," he said to Reginald.

"Nay, may I not be both?"

"Hardly, as the English parsons go. I cannot reconcile the life of the rector of a fat living to that of his divine Master."

"Perhaps I may be a lean curate all my days. Would that suit you better?" asked Regie.

"It would depend how you carried your leanness," was the answer. "Whether you enjoyed it or repined at it. I rather fancy you would aspire to the fat living, where you could indulge in excess of culture, etc."

Reginald smiled, and did not deny the assertion.

"Well, my boy, I wish you a calm and safe retreat in some little earthly paradise, where you may vegetate luxuriously, perhaps grow fat, drone

out your seventh-day weekly drudgery, and make up for it, during the six days, by sweet repose."

"Thanks; but 'destiny doth shape our ends,' and I should prefer still higher work. But, Arthur, surely you will not distress us all by working in a coal mine."

"I must also follow my destiny. I want to see for myself what our poor fellows have to endure, to see if any amelioration can be found, if in any way their lives might be made better and brighter. You look after their souls above ground, I will do my little best for both body and soul below."

"An unnecessary self-sacrifice."

"Don't see it. It is sure to be made easier for me than for most of them; and, when I get home, think of my advantages."

"But why offend father and mother, and make them live in hourly anxiety?"

"A soldier does not obey his parents, but his captain. Will it be worse for them than for thousands and thousands of poor parents? My God, Regie! when I think what sacrifices the poor have to make to obtain our comforts and their own

poor necessities, I feel what a set of miserable cowards we gentlemen are, and I have sworn to myself times without end that my life shall be as hard as theirs. Here I have health and physical strength, a certain amount of knowledge and high hopes to inspire me, and there are hundreds I know, poor-spirited, diseased, ignorant fellows, leading nobler lives than I. It shall not be. We gentlefolks ought to contribute our share of muscle and energy in dangerous employments, and I mean to leave the beaten track and make one of my own."

It was always so. It was of no use talking to him; he invariably came to the same conclusion.

Reginald admired Arthur's principles immensely; but, as he said, the sacrifice of one such life was merely like casting a chip into the sea to turn the tide.

"Let me be the chip, then," cried Arthur, rising and stretching his long limbs. "Let me be the chip if the tide is flowing the wrong way."

Reginald was pursuing his studies at Oxford, and was home for the vacation. Four years had

elapsed since the closing of my last chapter. Gerrie was now in her fourteenth year, and Pattie in her seventeenth, and they still entertained a mutual admiration for each other. Pattie's face was still her fortune. No one who saw it could ever forget it. Her features lengthened, and her eyes began to wear a melancholy expression. Life to her had become still harder; for her mother had died, and her father had married again—a hard, driving, upper servant, who treated Pattie like a scullery-maid. She was a clean, thrifty woman, so even Pattie looked tidier than formerly, and the house-place, whenever Gerrie had a peep, wore a look of comfort. These signs of prosperity deceived Gerrie as to the condition of her humble friend, and, being still under the care of Sister Grey, she had few opportunities of conversing with the gardener's daughter.

Gerrie had long since drained all Sister Grey's educational resources, and in most accomplishments had outstripped her. The Sister's mental capacities were limited, and she had no ambition to stretch them to any length to the slightest inconvenience to herself. She never dreamt of pre-

paring her lessons. What she could not tell her, Gerrie must find out for herself. Gerrie learnt to play duets with her, very simple ones, and the child took the easiest part. Now, however, Gerrie was assigned the most difficult one, and was irritated beyond all patience at her teacher's blundering. Then Gerrie read with avidity all kinds of books: histories, biographies, novels even. To do this, she had to hide herself in all kinds of places—even under the bed, hidden by the valances, or in secret nooks of the shrubberies.

As I have noticed before, a high wall ran round the Hall grounds; at one end was a rubbish-heap, which gradually accumulated until any one standing upon it could see plainly into the road below. The road was not prepossessing—generally silent enough except at night.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening. Gerrie was absorbed in the story of the early life of "David Copperfield," she had been crying in sympathy with his sorrows, when her attention was aroused by the sound of many voices, mingled with women's cries. She cautiously ascended the rubbish-heap, which was par-

tially covered with the prickly rose-branches that had been lopped off by the gardener Atkins, and cast aside to be burnt. She felt timid, and had no intention of being seen, but to see. Before her, white and clear, lay the long turnpike road; to the right the main road to the village, to the left a narrow lane leading down a steep incline, a well worn lane by the feet of men black with toil at pit or furnace. In the triangle between this lane and the turnpike road was an open space, at one end of which swung the sign of the "Black Swan," and at the other the inn itself. A number of men and boys had apparently left this place, and were gathering together in ominous numbers round two men standing in the centre, stripped to the waist, in deadly combat.

It was a horrible sight to the child, one she never, never forgot. Women and children were screaming with terror, while the men, brutalised by their weary animal lives, were excited almost to enthusiasm at the dreadful sight, shouting and encouraging the combatants as they rose and fell.

Gerrie thought she recognised one of the men as the gardener's brother, who bore a shocking character. His face was covered with blood.

"Oh, do stop them!" she screamed as loudly as she could, but no one heard her.

"Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do!" she cried, as once again one of the combatants fell with a thud. Then she determined to go to the house and find some one to put an end to the dreadful proceedings. Heedless of brambles, she clambered down and rushed into the Hall. She dared not call aloud, for her mother was now a confirmed invalid. She went first to her father, but he was out, then she went to Jones and found him engaged in the peaceful employment of cleaning plate.

"Oh, Jones! some men are fighting horribly; do go and stop them or they will kill each other."

"Can't help it, Miss Gerrie, I'm not a constable. No use me meddling."

"Oh, but something must be done, Jones!"

"Oh, let 'em be, miss. They'd fight it out anyhow."

"I shall run to the Rectory and send Mr. Regie."

Jones laughed, saying, "Much good he'll do, miss."

But Gerrie put on her hat and went.

She met Laura Jewel just coming out.

"Oh, Laura! where is Mr. Regie? Some men are fighting horribly, I want him to come and stop them."

"Well, Gerrie, you are absurd! You don't know half as much as I do. Why, they are always fighting. Papa says they are savager than the aborigines. But Regie would not go near them. Arthur might."

"Where is he, then?"

"On the lawn." So to the lawn the two girls went, where croquet-hoops were fixed, and Arthur was stretched his full length on the grass, with a pipe in his mouth.

He jumped up when he saw his young visitor, but before he had time to accost her, she screamed almost, "Do, do come!"

"To the world's end," he answered; "but what's the matter?"

"Oh, two men are killing each other, I'm sure they are."

"Poor devils!" muttered Arthur under his breath, at the same time walking quickly with the two girls towards the gate.

"And such men will be your companions," said Laura, reproachfully. "They can't do better than kill each other, as papa says of the Americans, and I say it of these low people."

"What you say does you no credit. Gerrie's terrors and tears are much more becoming," was the stern reply.

On reaching the Hall gates he parted with them and hurried to the scene of the affray, while Gerrie led Laura to the rubbish-heap, and together they crept up, terrified yet fascinated by their sense of horror.

There was, however, little to be seen. The combatants had gone and the crowd dispersed; only one or two groups of women stood in knots, talking excitedly.

"It was all over before Arthur got there. Perhaps they heard me scream," said Gerrie, com-

forting herself with the thought that she might have done something by that feeble means.

Gerrie and Laura then went into the house.

They found Philip Vernon Hoxton at play in the wide hall. He was on his rocking-horse, and riding furiously like a young Jehu.

"Gee—whoa! Come up!" he cried, lustily, beating the fortunately insensible brute with all his force.

His hair was long, and tossed wildly back; his large, black eyes were quite fierce, the iris scarcely filling the white of the eye sufficiently when labouring under any kind of excitement. He was what the servants called "an awful boy;" passionate, headstrong, wilful, and frightfully energetic. He feared literally nothing, and cared for no one but Gerrie, whom he tormented alternately by his demonstrative affection or determined opposition. The "live doll" had grown up a thorn in her side; but she tried to love him, and found it very hard.

"Isn't he a little Turk?" laughed Laura.
"He ought to wear a turban, and keep slaves."

"He makes slaves," replied Gerrie, quietly, "and that is quite as bad. Nurse Grey and nursie, mamma and I, are all martyrs to him! I wonder what he *will* be, if some one doesn't take him in hand."

"A Sultan," said Laura, "if you only pack him off to Constantinople. But I know I would find some way of punishing him. Doesn't your father take him in hand?"

"Not often; it makes papa cross to hear complaints, and he says it is our fault that we cannot manage him. I really think mother is terrified at his overbearing vehemence; he always makes her ill when he has been in her room."

"And he is heir to everything, and your poor little nose is put out altogether. I say, Gerrie, don't you wish he had never been born?"

"No; I never have thought of such a thing—of course not."

But if *she* had not, it was by no means the first time she had heard that wish expressed. Bolton uttered it loud enough in her hearing, and once she had even heard her mother exclaim:

“Oh, that dreadful boy; what a curse he will be!”

But Gerrie was a wise child, and never repeated those bitter words, though they made a lasting impression.

Jumping off his horse, the young tyrant, aged seven, slashed his whip and cried loudly:

“Out of the way, you girls; I’s e coming round.”

And so he did, dragging the horse after him.

The girls left him in his glory, and went into the drawing-room, anxiously awaiting Arthur, who promised to return and let them hear the result of that sanguinary engagement.

It was a beautiful room, upholstered in blue, every article giving evidence of refinement and taste. The piano was open, and Gerrie could never resist the impulse to let her hands stray over the keys.

“You will be a thorough musician some day, Gerrie,” exclaimed Laura; “your touch is so light.”

"I wish Sister Grey's was," remarked Gerrie.
"I don't think she likes music at all."

"Aren't you going to school somewhere? You would like it, I know. There's lots of fun at school. Why could you not return with me? It is my last quarter, and Miss Athelton would be so rejoiced if I introduced a new pupil. Ask Mrs. Hoxton."

It was a delightful idea, and Gerrie declared she would do so. There was a ring at the porch bell. Both girls rushed out, and met Arthur, who wore a very serious expression of face. Vernie had hold of his legs, and was imperiously demanding notice. He did not get it. Disengaging himself, Arthur came to Gerrie, and said, solemnly :

"You were right. It was a murderous conflict. Poor old Eyre is dead."

"Oh, how dreadful—how dreadful! Was the other man Joe Atkins?"

"It was, I am told; but he has been smuggled away somewhere. No one can find him," replied Arthur, then added, thoughtfully: "He could not have gone alone. His condition would have betrayed him. We must go to Atkins."

"He was nowhere about," cried Gerrie, terrified for her friend the gardener. "He was somewhere in the garden, and I would not call him to see his brother. He knows nothing, I am certain. What made them fight?"

"Some drunken dispute, I suppose. Passion is soon raised and not easily quelled, and has ended in death. But, Gerrie, you look quite ill. You ought never to have witnessed such a scene."

"Yes, Gerrie, have a glass of wine, and lie down; I will stay with you, shall I?" said Laura, alarmed at her white face.

The child consented, and Arthur took his departure.

About a month later Reginald had returned to Oxford, and Arthur had commenced his fightful toil in the "Turnwell" pit. On return from his first day's incarceration in the gloom, Arthur overtook Jacob Atkins, who wondered what could have possessed Master Arthur to go down the pits.

"You don't like it, sir, do you?" he inquired.

"Well, my lad, it is rather gloomy."

"You could find summat better to do than

that, sir. There are not many like you down there. When I fust went down I fancied it war just like hell; but I'm kinder used to it now."

"So shall I be, Jacob; and I hope to do a bit of good, too, by going down. I shall be what is called a mining engineer some day, and spend every power I have in trying to prevent explosions and other accidents."

"That'll be a good job," said Jacob.

"By-the-bye, my lad, have you heard anything of your uncle?"

"No, sir; and don't want."

"Not a word?"

"Well, I have heard that he were seen in Eastwood; but I reckon he's over the sea. My grandmother would know if anybody did. But she sits i' t' chimbley corner, smokes her pipe, and says note."

Yes, old Mrs. Atkins, who lived on the common, was as unpenetrable as a rock concerning most things, especially anything concerning her graceless son. John the gardener felt his face burn with shame, and a kind of terror, if he were asked

about his brother. If he were caught, what would be the end? The dead could not be restored to life, and the verdict against Joe had been manslaughter. That meant disgrace to all his family, and the respectable brother prayed God that he might never turn up again till Doomsday.

CHAPTER VII.

ARTHUR JEWEL invariably took the same route to and from the pit. He passed the Hall, crossed the road from whence he could see the upper windows of that ancient mansion, the chimney tops of the Hall Farm, and the gardener's cottage. Even at that early hour, smoke would occasionally be issuing therefrom, and the wooden gate would open, as Jacob passed through to accompany him on his way to their subterranean world, with all its gloom, and toil, and peril.

They rarely spoke on these subjects, conversation was generally on what interested them most above ground.

It was between four and five on this occasion, that Arthur took his early walk. Looking up, he observed that the Hall was unusually lit up. Not only *one* window, but all, were ablaze with

light. Very thoughtfully he stood still a moment, and tried to picture the interior of that gloomy-looking building. Towards Eastwood he could discern a shimmering of early dawn; but behind the old ivy-grown walls, all was dark as pitch. Was Mrs. Hoxton worse, or what could be the reason for so much light, evidence of human activity, at that unconscionable hour? Then he looked at Atkins' chimney; signs there, too, of stir. He could just discover a slight cloud of smoke piercing through the atmosphere.

Arthur opened the gate. The cottage door was ajar, and within was a bright fire. He drew near. A dog, the most mongrel of his species—every canine trait contradicting the others—gave a premonitory growl.

“Coming, Jacob?”

“Lor', it's Mr. Arthur.” It was Pattie's voice, and Mr. Arthur's heart beat tumultuously under the somewhat coarse waistcoat.

“Why are you up so early, Pattie?” he asked, taking off his hat with the same courtesy he would have used in a drawing-room. “It is too soon for you to be bustling about.”

"Not it, sir," replied Jacob, "it'll do her a world of good. Father has not been in bed to-night, and Pattie must see to him when he comes; we expect him every minute."

"Why, how is that! Is Mrs. Hoxton worse?"

"Most likely gone by now, Mr. Arthur," answered Pattie. "I'm glad I weren't there, as Miss Gerrie wanted me. What good could I have done?"

"So am I glad you weren't there," replied Arthur, "or I should not have seen you this morning."

"What's the good of that?" said the girl, bluntly.

"Only that I like to see you," Arthur said, simply and truly. He did not mean to make pretty speeches or to flatter this poor child of the people, though for years she had been to him as she was to Gerrie, a wonder of simplicity and beauty.

Pattie went on quietly putting up her brother's dinner. She put it in a small basin, a piece of bread and cheese uppermost, and tied it all in a cloth.

"Have you note with you, Mr. Arthur?" she asked, with some anxiety.

It gave him a throb of joy that she should so far think of him.

"I always dine late, and merely take this with me," he answered, fumbling in his pocket and producing therefrom a flask of sherry and a small bag of biscuits. "I don't think I could eat a dinner in that atmosphere."

"You gentlefolks are so fine and particular; but here, Jacob, look sharp! If you don't start you'll be ever so late."

She handed him the basin, tied up neatly in a cloth. Jacob took it mechanically without a word of thanks, for which Arthur felt inclined to kick him.

"You surly dog!" he exclaimed. "Not even a 'thank you' to poor Pattie for getting up at this unearthly hour to see to your comfort."

"Lor', Mr. Arthur," cried the girl, "that's note. I want no thanks. We are none used to such polite ways."

Arthur sighed, and looked and felt unutter-

able things. Jacob noticed his silence and depression, as they proceeded up the common.

"There's a deal of difference between you and me, sir," said the lad.

"Yes, and it puzzles me," replied the gentleman. "I see no need for the immense gulf there really is. It is not that you are poorer than I; it is your rude, uncultured manners, and these, Jacob, need not exist."

"You see, sir, it's just how we are taught and brought up," replied Jacob.

"You are courteous enough to those you think are your betters. Oh, that I could induce you to be so always among yourselves."

"That's just it, sir. And I can't tell how it is."

Nor could Arthur.

Mrs. Hoxton lay a-dying with the utmost unconcern of that fact. For years she had dreamt of it, and had invariably woke out of such troubled sleep in a cold perspiration and with a beating heart. Now, however, that the unwelcome guest was at the very door, he was no longer looked upon as the King of Terrors, he

was not as such recognised by her. The lady lay, breathing with difficulty, her eyes turned frequently to the door. It was her graceless husband alone who now dwelt in her thoughts. If he went out of the room, she pined for him; if he entered, a momentary look of supreme satisfaction lit up her countenance.

About three o'clock in the morning, the Squire, leaving the doctor sitting by the side of his wife, repaired to the library, and stood with his back leaning against the marble mantelpiece. He was serious and thoughtful, with a real feeling of melancholy. Suddenly the door opened very quietly, and a stealthy step halted within the again closed door, as if afraid to draw nearer.

The two occupants of that handsome room gazed into each other's face for some moments.

Neither spoke.

"Your wife is nearly gone," said the woman at last.

Philip Hoxton drew out his large silk pocket-handkerchief, used it freely, and sighed deeply.

"I'm so sorry for her. May I be sorry for you, too?"

There was a pause, and no answer from the Squire.

"I can't grieve for myself—how can I?" she exclaimed, passionately. "Oh, to be free; oh, to be myself once more!"

"For mercy's sake, at such a time restrain your gratification," he answered, turning round angrily.

Then the door opened, and Gerrie appeared, with dishevelled hair, and eyes red with weeping.

"Oh, father! Father, come!"

Without another word to his companion, he followed his daughter up the wide, softly-carpeted staircase, but paused in awe at the chamber of death.

When he entered, he found he was too late—his wife had drawn her last sigh. Gerrie threw her arms round his neck in a passion of grief.

"Poor little girl!" he said, caressingly, "you and I must be more than ever to each other now."

And in her father's unaccustomed tenderness, the motherless girl found consolation.

Then he led her away, the poor, bruised, bereaved, long-neglected child, and others came

in, Bolton and nurse having to fulfil the last sad offices for their departed mistress. Gerrie went and lay down by the side of her young brother, ready to break the tidings to him when he awoke, in the gentlest way she could.

Mrs. Tupton, from the Hall, came up from the kitchen, where she had been for hours awaiting the end. It had come more suddenly than even the doctor anticipated.

"I wonder if my Lady Grey has had a finger in the pie," said outspoken, imprudent Bolton.

"Lor! don't you go for to say no such thing," replied Mrs. Tupton, whose father had been under the Squire, and who never would allow anything derogatory to her master's dignity to be uttered in *her* presence, without remonstrance.

"I shouldn't wonder. She's not been here these five years and more for nought, and never a bit of pains has she taken with Miss Gerrie, who's fair taught herself what she knows."

"Well, it is a good job, I suppose, as how Master Vernon came; for, unless he had, this property would go to another branch, and Miss Gerrie would be none the richer, eh?"

“Wouldn’t she though? I knows better. But, bless yer heart, whatever she has she will spend it on some one else,” said Bolton—to which the others agreed. They kept all on the move during this conversation, each knowing what had to be done, and none interfering with the others. Mrs. Tupton took out of her pocket a fancy snuff-box, and passed it round. Bolton took a comforting pinch, nurse refused. Then they each partook of a little brandy and water; while doing so a hand was laid on the door outside.

“It’s that Miss Grey, I’ll back,” exclaimed Bolton, “the artfullest, deceitfullest body as ever I met. She’s no nun, never has been; don’t know no more nor Master Vernon what to do wi’ her beads. Caught her myself going to the Protestant Church when she had told master and all of us as how she were going so far just for t’ sake of going to th’ Catholic! My opinion is that such religion is worse nor none.”

“In course it is. It’s hacts as makes one religious; but, lor! Bolton, she’ll be listening through t’ keyhole.”

"Good job, too! I wish she could hear a bit o' my mind!"

But they did not hear anything more. Sister Grey went to her own room, and taking off even her slippers lest she should be heard, she paced her floor an hour or more. Then she crept to the night nursery where Master Vernon slept; by his side lay Gerrie, overcome by sad excitement. The woman compared the two. There was no outward resemblance to prove them brother and sister. Asleep, Vernon looked the handsomest of the two, his rich black hair, long eyelashes, glowing cheeks, and full, rosy lips comparing brilliantly with Gerrie's soft, curly brown hair, high, pale forehead, thin upper lip, and far less blooming complexion.

"Vernon is most like his father," muttered the woman, "and if I hated one I should hate the other."

She gazed on the two but kissed neither, and then glided noiselessly away.

When Arthur passed the Hall on his return journey, every blind was down. This he saw

through the open gates. People were talking in groups, men coming from work, women standing akimbo or with white aprons thrown over their bare arms, all engrossed by one grim subject—the death and coming funeral of the lady of the Hall. Such a tragic event was of no little moment in Broughton.

Who was to be the undertaker? Would there be a hearse for so short a distance? Who would be housekeeper now? And a thousand and one inquiries the villagers asked one of the other, without a single gleam of intelligence from any human authority on the subjects raised. At such times the curious feed on surmises, and if one out of a dozen turns out correct, the satisfaction is expressed on every possible occasion by the words, “I told you so,” “I knew quite well,” etc. These kinds of wiseacres are found in every class, and are in general the most painfully ignorant of even attainable facts.

Death was almost always tragic among the male portion of that pit country, only women and gentlefolk seemed allowed to die quietly in their beds. Funeral obsequies were made the most of

to impress young and old with their solemnities. There was always a passing-bell to commence with, lasting about twenty minutes, from the old church tower, supposed to accompany the departing soul from this world to the next, and to warn the living, heedless mortals that in the midst of life death stares them in the face; but when any one died of any note, this passing-bell was changed for the minute-bell, which continued a whole hour, as extra torture to the nerves of the wealthy. Thus, Gerrie's hour of agony had passed, and she had never imagined before how painful it could be.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE death of her mother made very little apparent change in Gerrie's monotonous life. The old servants still retained their places ; no housekeeper was appointed. Sister Grey remained much on her old footing, once telling her pupil that she would shortly be old enough to take her mother's place at the head of the table.

To Gerrie, there was a perceptible change in Sister Grey. Without being in the slightest presumptuous, she seemed to act with more authority over every one save herself. To Gerrie she was even more courteously ceremonious than ever ; but from Vernon she tried to exact absolute obedience. She set herself, in that matter, an impossible task.

"You aren't my mamma. I shan't ! I won't ! I hate you !" were his frequent replies when she

threatened him with punishment. Now Bolton took kindly to the boy, which, to all in the house, seemed quite unaccountable. He would hide himself in the pantry from his self-constituted guardian, and come forth with his black velvet jacket all bespotted with flour, or with moisture on his trousers from sitting on the vegetables, or, perhaps, smelling odiously of apple-peelings. The worst pickle he could make of himself he persisted in doing, in spite of even Gerrie's remonstrances.

"Sister Grey isn't my sister, nor my mamma, nor nothing; nor I ain't going to have her. I'll shoot her with my pop-gun, right in her ear or in her eye, 'cos I hate her, and so does Bolton and nursie. Why don't she go, Gerrie?"

"Because pa wishes her to stay to look after us."

"'It's just because you're such a baby,' Jones says—I heard him, I did—'and can't see what's as plain as a pikestaff.' What is a pikestaff, Gerrie? I asked Jones, but he said, 'Never you mind, Master Vernon.'"

Gerrie was puzzled. What could Jones mean? What was there to see? At any rate, of one

thing she was quite sure, and that was she was growing up a big dunce. Why, even Jacob knew more than she did, for he learnt every night in his bedroom, and went to a night-school, and had a Sunday-school class; and he was only a common boy, and she was a lady.

"Papa, dearest," she said to him one morning when the coast was clear, Sister Grey having quitted the room to run after Vernon, who, without his hat, had rushed into the shrubbery in spite of a cold east wind, "papa, may I go to school?"

"To school! Why, Gerrie, I was growing to look upon you as too wise for school. How old are you?"

"Fourteen, papa, and I know such a very little bit."

"If you went to school you would only learn that which would take you years to unlearn, and the knowledge of which would harm you rather than be an improvement."

"Do you think I couldn't learn German and music, French and painting?"

"Of course you could, and can and ought to

be so learning. Doesn't Sister Grey teach you such things?"

"What she can," replied Gerrie, evasively.

"And that is not much. Well, well, child, we must look about for some one else; but I can neither afford to let you go away nor spare you. That young ragamuffin will cost a mint of money. He must soon be despatched to some public school, where he will be flogged into order and obedience."

So Gerrie again was disappointed, and came to the conclusion that she was paying a heavy penalty for being obedient and yielding, instead of obstreperous and obstinate, like the young heir who ruled by his passions.

But there was compensation in store for Geraldine. About four o'clock she was dolefully playing the piano in the drawing-room, when Jessie Jewel was ushered in by Jones, and was greeted with every demonstration of joy by the lonely girl.

"Oh, you darling! Have you come to spend Easter with us? I want you all the time."

"I have come for good," replied Jessie, "for

I intend to stay at home, now, as papa wishes me."

"How delicious! What glorious times we will have now. But isn't it rather sudden?"

"Yes, and I am not altogether glad; for I had so much to do with Mrs. Glynn, and I like that."

"Then why did you not stop? Never mind telling me if you don't like, dear."

"It is no fault of mine, and I don't see why I should not tell. Mrs. Glynn sent me a little note into the school-room, such an extraordinary one, telling me that she would be so much obliged to me if I would leave her as soon as I could, because the children were becoming so attached to me, that I was taking her place in their affections. Poor woman! What an idea to get into her head! However, there it was, and I of course left at once."

Geraldine looked very thoughtful. She did not speak.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Jessie.

"Well, dear, I am not a bit surprised, for

you are so sweet, and perhaps she was not. Yet it must have been very hard for her to see that they loved you best."

"Yes, if it were so ; but, my dear Gerrie, they could not really have loved me best, better than their own mother. Oh, no ; that was only her imagination."

"Perhaps not. If some mothers are cross and disagreeable, can children really love them the same as if they were good, kind, loving mothers ?"

"I think ladies generally prefer that the governess should do all the necessary scoldings and painful part of the education of their children, and I don't take kindly to those duties. Besides, I find it so much easier to rule by love than fear. So I am unfit for a governess. I shall never go out in such capacity again—never."

"I am glad—because you can come and see me, and I you," said Gerrie, "and the dear old home has been very gloomy. I love it ; oh, you don't know how much, but sometimes it seems to me as if it must be haunted. I wake up out of my sleep in the middle of the night, and fancy

I hear people who have been dead for ages walking about, along the corridors, on the creaking old staircases, overhead in the empty attics. Now and then they seem to be jangling and quarrelling. Bolton believes in dreams, and Pattie Atkins' mother once saw a witch in that dreadful little cottage on the common, where she lived when Pattie was a baby."

"Nonsense," said Jessie, half-smilingly, "there are no such things."

"Oh, but it is quite true. And there used to be witches, so there must be now, though we are not allowed to consult them, or fetch them up. Mrs. Atkins' witch was all eyes, nothing but eyes."

"You would not like to see such a one, would you?"

Geraldine looked very grave.

"I should like to see a ghost, a real ghost," she said. "Some day I shall try."

"How, Gerrie?"

"Oh! Bolton knows a good many ways."

"It is very wrong of Bolton to talk to you in such a way."

"No, it is not. I like it, and I really do wish I could see mamma's spirit. To some people their dead return. Why shouldn't mother, and tell me that she is happy? I should not be one bit frightened."

"You must believe, darling, without such supernatural assurances."

"Believe! oh, of course I believe; but I would like to know, and it can't be wicked to try and find out."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"Some night, the eve of some saint's day, I forget which, I am going to sit in the middle of the kitchen, with the front door open, and the back door too, just as the clock strikes twelve, all by myself in the dark, and the spirit of the person who died that year will brush past me, leaving a cold air all round me. You may do the same at the Rectory."

"I would rather not," said Jessie, "and, Gerrie, you must not dream of such wild tales being true."

"Oh, but I do so want to know something for certain. Perhaps papa would believe them;

but—well, it is the Hall I think makes me so dreamy. Now you are come, you will take me out with you to see the schools, and into Lutterfield, and about. Oh, dear! what a relief that you are come, and really going to stay. Are you glad to leave York?"

No; Jessie was not glad. She knew that her father more than lived up to his income. She knew that at home she had no settled duties, that she wasted many hours a day, from the sheer inability to find useful employment. If she could have found congenial as well as useful employment at the Rectory, or in the parish, home would indeed be an earthly paradise; but she never hinted at any method of improving her time and talents, or of doing good to the poor people around, but it was pooh-poohed by her parents, by Reginald, and Laura. The greatest kindness to Dick was, she knew, to let him alone, and the best appreciated of her other deeds were those most useless to herself and the world around her. Jessie's mania for being useful was most objectionable.

"There is a great deal to be done in a village like this," said Jessie, presently, "if only we knew how to start about it. People are so densely ignorant, in fact, they don't even know how to talk their own language. Whose fault is it?"

"They have a language of their own, and I am sure poor mamma used to say it was shocking to see the women gossiping at their doors as we came along. But do you know, Jessie, I can't see that it is a bit more shocking for poor people to talk at their doors outside than for rich people to call upon each other and gossip in their beautiful drawing-rooms. Do you?"

"I dare say there is not so much difference as we more fortunate individuals imagine. People must talk and exchange ideas and confidences somewhere or other."

"Of course they must; and only think how much more poor people who live in smothering little kitchens must need the fresh air than we do. Look at poor Pattie. What a beautiful, ignorant, hard-working darling she is; she does

more in a day than I do in a month, and yet her mother scolds her if she stops one minute on her way to speak to any one. The no doing is our greatest burden, isn't it?"

"I really think it is," said Jessie, seriously.

She was some years older than Gerrie Hoxton, and for the last eighteen months had been governess in a clergyman's family, entirely at her own suggestion. To her parents it was absolutely painful that a daughter of theirs should earn her living in any capacity, almost as bad as a son risking life and limb with the low men down a coal-pit.

Laura more than imbibed their pride; in her it was even exaggerated.

However, Jessie was at home again—once more a lady. Laura determined to try and keep her there.

But there was no kindred spirit between these sisters. Arthur was as delighted as possible that Jessie had come home permanently. He and Laura were almost antagonistic, while between him and Jessie was immeasurable sympathy. Laura absolutely did not know what sympathy meant.

Self-gratification was her sole aim. She avoided all things that gave her even momentary pain or discomfort. The beauty of self-sacrifice was to her a mere chimera, a delusion, a mania. The poor of the parish and their needs, mental or physical, were of the smallest interest. Accidents, misfortunes, sickness, and occasional crimes would awaken curiosity and exclamation; but they were all taken as matters of course. An explosion in a coal-pit, whereby a hundred souls were launched into eternity, was a far less exciting or deplorable event than that one gentleman should be killed on the railway, become bankrupt, or be injured in the hunting-field. The latter related to her own species, the former to quite a different race, as inferior as the Maories of Australia to the European emigrants. And these views were not original, they sprung from her ancestors for generations back, for they were an old family with a painfully long pedigree on both sides. How was it that their children were so extremely unlike, not only in character, but in person?

Jessie insisted upon Gerrie accompanying her to the Lodge on what she named a morning call.

It was between two and three as they passed the old, square-towered church, and looked up at the clock.

"We shall be in nice time," said Jessie. "Mrs. Roberts is rarely visible till the afternoon, and Blanche rarely at home."

"I wonder if Mr. John is come back; because I don't like him at all," said Gerrie, "and Bolton does tell such tales about people. I have no one to talk to, you know, except Bolton and nursie, and Bolton says such queer things I can't help laughing at her. And, Jessie, I really think she sees through people in a wonderful way."

"How, dear?"

"Well, when she sees a body she says she can always *feel* what they are. Some make her fair creep, she says. Now she likes you and Mr. Regie and Arthur."

"Not Laura?"

"No, not a bit; nor Atkins, nor Sister Grey—only when she talks of Sister Grey she always adds: 'There's some one to blame worse nor her.' Always those same words."

"Perhaps there is," said Jessie.

“Who can it be? Can you guess? When I ask Bolton she says, ‘Now, Miss Gerrie, never you ask no questions about *it* and you’ll hear no lies.’ Then I say, ‘Bolton wouldn’t tell me lies.’ ‘Oh,’ she says, ‘most likely she should.’ But I am really beginning to wish Sister Grey *would* go away. Vernon detests her. I believe Bolton teaches him to do that, and the servants don’t care for her, and she can’t teach me a little bit. Why *I* could teach *her*. So why should she stop? But there is no one to tell her to go.”

“Your father, I suppose?” said Jessie.

“Of course he could; but Bolton says he never will, so there we are! I have been telling papa to-day what a dreadful dunce I am growing up. He said he thought I was learning French and German, music and painting from poor Sister Grey. Why, dear, she knows no more music than old Joe Bannington, no more languages than dear old poll-parrot, and as for drawing, Jacob Atkins is much cleverer; he ought to be an artist. Isn’t it a shame that people, with such a love for nature, should be toiling down the pits, away from the beautiful sunlight, this lovely

weather? Oh, dear, what a world it is, as Bolton says."

So she chatted on unceasingly and unreservedly to her friend, as they walked down the broad, well-kept road, gleaming white and clean in the centre, while at each side was a wide expanse of green grass, hedged by hawthorn and blackberry-trees. Here and there, an occasional wild rose was coming into bud, the wayside flowers were sprouting up in all directions. They approached the Lodge, embedded in lofty elms, chestnuts, and poplars, the songs of the various birds innumerable filling the else still air with floods of music.

Both girls forgot everything in the enjoyment of the scene.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. GURNON, at the Lodge gates, came out and curtseyed to the young ladies; a comely, bright-looking matron, who had just watched her children take their way to school. She informed them that she believed all the family were at home, for Mr. John had returned for a week or two, and Mrs. Streatham had come the night before with Master Frank. They walked up the well-shaded avenue, Gerrie confessing to feeling very timid, for the poor child so seldom paid a visit.

They were ushered into a magnificent hall, excelling their own, not so much in size, as in the comparative brightness of its surroundings. Though of good family, the Roberts' were not averse to modern improvements, as had been Mrs. Hoxton. In fact, there was nothing patented that did not find its way down to Broughton

Lodge, either by one or other members of that by no means economical family. They were not under the slightest necessity to be economical, for, if money went out fast, it came in still faster. Mr. Roberts was principal owner of all the land in the neighbourhood, the pits and the ironworks were his, as well as the living (the woods were the Squire's), so he could afford to be luxurious, generous, gay; and he was all this.

Mrs. Roberts had been his equal in all respects; there was not a single known cause for any dissatisfaction between them.

Mrs. Roberts was a tall, fine-looking woman, always richly and appropriately attired. She knew how to grow old gracefully, as well as comfortably.

She had everything in the world that she was capable of appreciating; she liked the days to go by thus monotonously pleasant. There was only one change desirable, and that was the marriages of her children; but she made no violent efforts to gain this end, allowing things to take their chance quietly enough.

Her eldest daughter had married a wealthy

clergyman, and Mrs. Roberts was slightly disconcerted by the fear that Blanche, the flower of the flock, was losing her heart to Reginald Jewel, who would also be a clergyman, but a poor one. She was not at all sure that any intimacy between her children and those two young visitors was desirable.

They were both very pretty; but, unfortunately, not exactly eligible. She measured out her cordiality accordingly, the more so, as she noticed with what marked affection Blanche greeted them both.

Mr. John was present, towards whom Gerrie felt an instinctive, but unaccountable aversion. She resented his remarks on the physical height she had achieved, and the questioning look in his eyes as he examined her appearance with critical impertinence. Sometimes he addressed her as still a child, and the next time with deference. Either way annoyed her.

Old Mr. Roberts was quite amused at her manifest perturbation. Gerrie was a great favourite of his, he would have preferred her for his future daughter-in-law over any other young lady in the

neighbourhood, declaring her to be no common beauty or character.

Jessie never shone on the occasion of making a formal call, as this was ; and though she had a great deal of mental capacity, all the gold was kept in reserve, and she was frequently lacking in the small change of conversation.

Blanche Roberts was most anxious to ingratiate herself with Jessie, for she would give all the wealth of Broughton to win the love of Reginald Jewel. Regie, however, had not the faintest idea that he had inspired her with such an affection.

Miss Roberts was a year or two his senior, and had been sought after as an eligible partner for years by far-seeing parents when he was a mere hobbledehoy. Indeed, Miss Blanche was generally considered something of a flirt, for, after making herself agreeable for some time with one or another of her acquaintances, she invariably turned upon them the cold shoulder, giving unmistakable evidence that their society bored her. Whenever that was the fact, "I will never marry a man that could even make

his presence a boredom," she would say. "I give them every opportunity of finding out what I am, and I take every means to learn what *they* are; and if I find they don't please me, it is pure kindness to let them know it."

Reginald never wearied her. To look at his chiselled features, to watch the varying expressions on his handsome face, was as good as a play or a visit to the Academy. And Regie was not indifferent to her society. Her kind smiles he considered much pleasanter than the prude coldness of many ladies; her amicable chatter on every imaginable subject made her always companionable to him. He thought it quite a pity that all women were not equally agreeable; but, as for loving her, such a thought never crossed his imagination, always hearing and believing that she was already engaged, or about to be so, with some one else. But he thoroughly enjoyed her society, and did not care who knew it.

Mr. John Roberts, the only son and heir to so much wealth, would never speak of marriage. He was apparently quite content with life as a

bachelor, but was everywhere looked upon quite as a lady's man, and a most desirable match by all parents and guardians for miles round. But he declared he was not to be caught, and thereby frequently disappointed his own parents, to whom his marriage was one of absorbing interest and importance. And what could be the cause of his reluctance to enter the matrimonial state they could not imagine. To their knowledge he had met with no disappointment. Though universally agreeable to the fair sex, no lady had ever made any deep impression upon him. Of enthusiastic passion or rapturous soul sympathy he was quite incapable, being a very ordinary being indeed intellectually, yet with some capacity for stratagem and with many inventive resources. Moreover, he could keep his own counsel, and if guilty of misdemeanours even as a boy, was rarely found out. To his mother he was a perplexity, if not an anxiety, when he vowed he would not be victimised. Mr. Roberts kept open house at the hospitable Lodge, and was not by any means considered an exclusive man among his neighbours. His

dinner - parties were thoroughly appreciated, not only for the good fare provided, or the rich old wines from his capacious cellars, the excellent waiting, etc., but for the unconventional conversational way in which they were conducted. It rarely occurred that a visitor felt bored; if it should happen, it must have been his own fault rather than that of his host.

Jessie had been to more than one of these liberal banquets, and found them most pleasurable, for Jessie had a well-stored mind and could converse on any topic.

When the half-hour's call was ended, John Roberts accompanied the two friends to the Lodge gates, where Gerrie congratulated herself upon bidding him farewell.

"What makes you dislike him so, Gerrie?" inquired Jessie.

"I do not like thee, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell,"

answered Gerrie, laughing. "I'm like Bolton. There are some people I like, and others I can't abide. He's one of the latter."

Gerrie went to the Rectory to tea, calling at the Hall gates to leave a message for her father.

About five o'clock Arthur came home from the pits. They could hear him go upstairs in order to make himself presentable for dinner. There was no necessity that he should annoy any member of his own family with a sight of the unpleasant remnants of his unsightly occupation. He took a splendid bath, changed every article of apparel, and appeared at the dinner-table one of the most presentable young men in the county, with glowing health on his cheek, keen intelligence in his eye, and the manners of a courtier; for he now, more than ever, cultivated the polish of good society. The Rector was not yet reconciled to his children's delinquencies. He spoke much in an aggrieved tone, without making the slightest allusions to subjects upon which he knew they liked argument. He invariably spoke of common-places—the weather, the news of the day—eschewing politics and religion. In fact, he did not make himself agreeable to any one but their little guest, Geraldine Hoxton. Now Gerrie never could feel on easy terms with the owner of the

skull-cap, whose appearance in the pulpit had never ceased to awe and weary her beyond all power of expression. But she was flattered and pleased when he asked her to assist in the Sunday-school, which, since Jessie's absence from home, had been miserably dwindling in numbers.

"But where do the children go?" asked Gerrie.

"To the dreadful chapels, my dear," said Mrs. Jewel, "where they learn all kinds of Radical notions. No wonder they cease to show respect to their superiors, or even to their parents. They want to be their own masters before they are out of their teens."

"That is just like Vernon," replied innocent Gerrie; "yet he never goes to chapel; and Sister Grey often teaches him his Catechism."

"But he has been much spoilt, has he not?" asked the Rector's wife.

"I don't know?" replied Gerrie, perplexed. Which was quite true; for Vernon had been scolded much more than she had, and had even been flogged, but was rather the worse than the better for the infliction. He had been educated

ten times more than any poor boy, and, as far as she could see, was ten times worse. How was it? Aloud she refused to utter any more inquiries. She must try and puzzle out her own answers.

Chapels were dreadful places, she was told; and yet Bolton often went to hear her own uncle, Henry Carpenter, an old man who lived quite the other end of the common, whom she described as the oldest, holiest, happiest man in Broughton. And, indeed, Gerrie had seen him several times, with his long, threadbare, gray coat, his low-crowned hat, out of which peeped locks of white hair. His figure was very emaciated, but, in spite of his stooping shoulders, was much above the middle height. Gerrie knew he was good and kind to the suffering poor, seeking help where he was utterly unable to assist himself. She knew how he was, even at that great age, fetched out of his home at midnight to attend the bedside of the dying, with the superstitious hope that the faithful prayers of so righteous a soul could command a safe entrance into Paradise of ever so guilty a sinner. But Gerrie would not raise a controversy on such a subject—not there and then.

She pondered the reasons why his chapels—for he seemed to preside over two or three—should be so much better filled than the church, and the Dissenting Sunday scholars be as much more numerous.

Laura adopted her mother's conclusions, namely, that church was for the upper classes of society, and chapel for the lower; and, of course, the best were always in the minority, so that empty churches did but prove their own superlative excellence.

After dinner Gerrie played backgammon with the Rector, Jessie and Laura played duets, while Arthur, finding poor Dick occupation in drawing, took out his books on the engineering of mines, in which he soon became absorbed. By-and-by the Squire joined the homely circle; then a party was formed for whist between the elder members, leaving Laura, Gerrie, and Arthur to amuse themselves. At first the two girls had a chat about the inmates of Broughton Lodge. Laura admired Mr. John greatly. His intonation, after the broad Midland brogue, was delightful, his dress so exquisite, his manners so courteous,

his language so refined; in fact, he was a perfect gentleman.

Gerrie was not inclined to be argumentative; but she really believed that one reason why Mr. John was obnoxious to her, must be because he was so pleasing to Laura. How could two such extremes agree? She contented herself with merely giving a dissentient shrug of her shoulders, a trick she had learnt from Sister Grey, a slight toss of her head or an unmistakable exclamation of disapproval. All these signs were not of the slightest significance to Laura Jewel.

“But clothes do make a tremendous difference in people. Don’t they?”

“In their appearance of course,” replied Gerrie, “not *in their real selves*.”

“Have you ever seen Arthur in his pit clothes?” asked Laura; “I always pretend I don’t know him, and walk the other side of the road. To see our own brother dressed coarsely, with hands and face almost like a chimney-sweep, is a trial to your nerves, I can tell you.”

“I have met him, and thought he looked so tall and straight. Most of the colliers appear

bowed down with care or toil, even when quite young. Arthur did not at all. I shook hands with him, and we both laughed because *he* would not and *I* would."

"Ah, well, Gerrie, you and I are so very different. Now, which do you like best, Reginald or Arthur?"

"You know them best," replied Gerrie, evasively. "Which is your favourite?"

"Sometimes one, and sometimes the other. Regie, at least, never reminds me that the colliers and their families are my brothers and sisters. Arthur delights in torturing my nerves. Reginald is always a gentleman, and Arthur tries not to be one at all."

"Oh, how can you say so!" cried Gerrie, indignantly. "Arthur's is the grandest life. You should hear Bolton speak of him. She says he is one of the noble army of martyrs."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Laura. "We don't thank Bolton, we don't want Arthur to be a martyr, but to live like a gentleman, and die—for I suppose he must die—at home, if you and Bolton please."

Gerrie turned away in tears... How could Laura think that Arthur was not living like a gentleman, nay, more, a hero; and how could she bear to think he would die? Laura was always so horrid, so hard and disagreeable. She went straight to Arthur to inquire if he were studying very, *very* hard.

"It is pretty stiff," he answered, cheerfully, looking into the sweet, tear-dimmed eyes. "But what's the matter, Gerrie? Let us have a game at chess."

Gerrie acquiesced, knowing quite well that from practice she was growing quite an expert.

So they played together till the Squire rose to go, Arthur being very mercifully-inclined towards his fair antagonist. She had, at any rate, the satisfaction of almost beating him, and promised herself a brilliant conquest next time she played.

Father and daughter stepped out into the darkness.

"Jessie is a sweet girl," said the Squire, thinking evidently of his late partner. "I wonder if she could be prevailed upon to assist you in

your studies with a fair remuneration; she has been teaching we know."

"Instead of Sister Grey?"

"Certainly! Sister Grey is no fixture, I suppose, and it would not be necessary for Jessie to wait for *her* departure, or for you to act as if you knew anything about it. Leave it all to me, my dear. If only you could ascertain whether Jessie would entertain the idea."

"Oh, I know she would. We two are going to begin a new school. We thought——"

"In opposition to Comtism, Agnosticism, etc., eh? What a little absurdity you are. Will you make me head and centre of your society?"

"I should like that," said Gerrie. "Perhaps Jessie may convert you. Who knows?"

"Who, indeed? Well, we shall see. And now not a word to a living soul on this our project."

These secrets with papa were quite too delightful and mysterious to Gerrie. Of course, she would keep them inviolate; but felt brimful of importance.

In the course of the week Jessie and Gerrie

had a long walk together through Eastwood. The day was brilliant, yet not hot, for it was still spring weather. The trees, though covered with their thin, new, green garments, were but slightly dense. The multitudinous paths branching hither and thither could be distinctly traced some distance. The birds of the wood seemed too seriously engaged in building their nests to waste their time in singing to the passers-by.

Suddenly they saw in front of them a figure they knew, a thin, slim, girlish figure, with a short black and scarlet shawl pinned round her shoulders. It was Pattie Atkins. What could she be doing there all alone? But, on observing her more closely, they found out she was not alone. Sitting under a thick-trunked, elderly ash, with its wide-spreading arms barely covered with tender leaves, was a man, a coarsely-dressed man. How horrid! How unlike anything ever before seen or heard of Pattie Atkins.

“Oh, Jessie, dear, what shall we do? Poor Pattie! You see, she has no mother, and lately no friend in me to speak to, for Sister Grey always is so cross if I speak about her; and

now, in her desolation, she is seeking such companionship as *that*. When I used to long for Pattie, some one used to say: 'For want of company, welcome trumpery.' And that must be poor Pattie's case. But, oh, don't let us watch them." And with true delicacy the two girls turned aside.

Again, ere they left the wood, they met another acquaintance, named Reuben May, the most stalwart young fellow in the village, with a quiet yet decided manner, that proved he would stand no nonsense; that, as he was true and honest in all his dealings, he looked for the same treatment, and if any one would try and deal otherwise with him, he would know the reason why.

Jessie had not seen him since her return from York; but they were known to be great friends in all that appertained to the well-being of the children of the place. They entertained and encouraged a mutual respect for each other, and every fresh proof of nobleness of character deepened this feeling. Reuben looking into her earnest eyes, her gravity seemed to inspire him. She seemed quite conscious of her superior position,

and did not wish him to forget it; and yet she would have him know at the same time how truly she esteemed him; that she felt no condescension in speaking to him with even deference when she dropped her more usual method of authority. Either way delighted Reuben, if only Miss Jessie seemed satisfied, smiled ever so slightly, encouraged him by a kind word.

Now, in the wood, she held out to the begrimed hand her delicate kidded one.

"My hands are not fit to take yours," said Reuben, holding back. "But, Miss Jessie, you're wanted worse in Broughton than anywhere else in the wide world."

"And how has the school been progressing?" asked Jessie.

"Well, Miss Jessie, some have been very punctual and others have fallen off, both on Sunday and at night; but we keep on. I have never missed since I promised you."

Jessie looked up.

"Well done, Reuben! It is satisfactory to find one person in the wide world who never deceives or disappoints you."

"Even such as me!" said Reuben, bitterly.

"Why such as you? Surrounded as you are with such ignorant and often wicked companions, it seems to me still more noble in you."

"Your aunt thinks there is no one so good as you, Reuben," cried Gerrie, admiringly. "Not even Mr. Arthur."

"My aunt, Miss Gerrie? Why, she don't know anything about it. You may tell her so if you like. Mr. Arthur is one in a million."

"Of course we know *that*, don't we, Jessie? but we can quite understand Bolton liking you best."

"Well, I can't, then, miss; that's all I can say," answered Reuben, and he looked as if he spoke truth.

"Do you know who those people are in the wood just down there? You must have passed them."

"One was Pattie Atkins; I saw her face quite plainly, and she looked terrified. The man looked ashamed of himself, as if he would not be recognised. Indeed, I could not get a look at his

face, but his figure reminded me of somebody; but the least said is the best. We mustn't get poor Pattie into a row."

"Oh, no, no, Reuben! I shall get hold of her, and ask her all to myself, and she will tell me all about it. For, you know, Pattie is a very, *very* great friend of mine."

"So I heard, Miss Gerrie."

"Yes; and you must not say one word of what you have seen. She has no kind mother now, and Atkins can be so cross."

They all promised secrecy; and Gerrie went home, quite weighed down with the burden of suppressed and unexpressed excitement. She had discovered that there was nothing on earth Jessie would like so much as to superintend her studies.

"And that simply because she does not know what a great, simple, stupid dunce I am," thought Gerrie.

CHAPTER X.

THAT evening after tea, when alone with her father, Gerrie told him of her success with Jessie; he said nothing. Gerrie was surprised and almost alarmed when the Squire received information silently. It generally happened that the subject turned up again with some unpleasant remarks shortly after. Perhaps he wished after all that he had not made the suggestion. Gerrie continued filling up the slippers she was bringing towards completion. Vernon had gone to bed, or that was his supposed destination, and Sister Grey as she followed him was very insidiously trying to ingratiate herself into his good books. She found it an almost impossible endeavour. Vernon would *not* be friends; and all her attentions but exasperated him the more.

“Father,” said Gerrie, with a courageous effort, “have you told Sister Grey that Jessie is coming?”

“Certainly not. Don’t you say a word at present.”

Evidently her father stood somewhat in awe of Sister Grey. Now to Gerrie, Sister Grey seemed a most insignificant individual, for whom she could not entertain half an ounce of admiration and not much affection; and yet she knew perfectly well, without being at all able to explain it, that her father, in some mysterious way, feared that quiet, unobtrusive, softly-treading individual. Why? Why on earth could he not dismiss her? Indeed, he seemed afraid of half his servants. Bolton—Jones—Atkins. What could make him so? And now this son and heir, for whom he had apparently longed so unutterably, turned out anything but satisfactory. His chief desire now seemed to be to get him off to school. Was it that her father was still very much like this son of his? always crying for things most unattainable, and when after all difficulties were surmounted and the thing longed for in actual

possession, the interest all died; the attainment crushing the desire. So it seemed.

"Jessie will only be able to manage *you*; Sister Grey has more than enough to look after Vernon. Are you to meet her to-day?"

"Yes, we are going to Lutterfield. Dr. Jewel has given Jessie permission to work in the parish, and we are going to the Vicarage to consult with Mrs. Price. When I and Jessie help him, he can enjoy his study more than ever; but I hope he won't find time to make longer sermons."

The Squire laughed and coincided.

"Sometimes the difficulty is to leave off. Well, and what is to be your rôle, little woman? To pray for your father?"

"I do that now," answered Gerrie, looking at his thin, handsome face, loving it inexpressibly, and yet feeling quite sure that he needed a great deal of praying for.

"I was always a graceless scamp, Gerrie. Don't interrupt me, I was; you see I knew that as eldest son I had no need for exertion. This property was mine by right, while your uncles, John

and Charles, and your aunts were very poorly provided for. I never encouraged generous sentiments, for if I had I should have been ruined. I was forced indeed to marry for money, and that was social misery enough. But circumstances have led me into deeper and deeper depths of perplexity. You are my only comfort, Gerrie."

"Oh, dear, dear papa! What a trouble money seems to bring with it—though mamma did love you so much!"

"True, child, she did, worthless creature as I am, and was. Poor thing! I hope she knows nothing more about us now; and, if there is another world, we shall be blessed with unconsciousness about this wretched existence."

"Don't, pa. The world is beautiful; there is something nice in everything and everybody. Just look at Jessie and Pattie, and——"

"Pattie—I thought you had quite got over your infatuation about her."

"If it had been infatuation, I must have done, mustn't I? But it was real, true friendship for her, and such a friendship *can't* be got over."

"When did you see her last?"

Gerrie went very red indeed; she was determined not to betray her friend, and paused before she answered.

"I have not been to the house for months. I don't like the new Mrs. Atkins."

"That is no answer to my question."

"Oh! when I saw Pattie last? Let me see. Two or three days ago, I thought I saw her out; but she was too far off from me to speak to her. You do not mind my speaking to her, do you?"

"No; but don't associate with such people. That murderous uncle of hers has never paid the penalty of his deeds yet, and no one can find him. It makes me so angry, that I feel inclined to turn Atkins away. He must know something of his whereabouts."

"I don't think he does; but he does grow very grumpy."

"Yes, and that girl is a regular drudge to his wife."

"Poor, poor Pattie. Pa, do let me be kind to her. May I not give her some of my old frocks and hats?"

"Her step-mother will make away with them if you do."

"But I will speak to Jacob."

"A superior sort of lad is that Jacob. Would make something better than a collier; his drawings are excellent, and they say he writes verses for the poets' corner of our *Courier*. Quite a literary character."

"Then, I am sure, dear papa, if he is appealed to, he will look better after Pattie."

"Ah, well, do what you can for the poor thing; your utmost won't be much."

Gerrie prided herself on the admirable way she had kept Pattie's secret, and the assent she had obtained to befriend her.

Before going out in the afternoon with Jessie, she passed through the garden gate into the Hall farm-yard, and knocked at Pattie's door.

It was opened by the new Mrs. Atkins, a tall, sharp-faced, sharp-voiced woman, with deep-set eyes and thin lips.

"Good day, Mrs. Atkins," said Gerrie; "is Pattie at home?"

"No, miss, I sent her on an errand more

than an hour ago, and she has not returned yet. This is the second time she has dallied about this week, but I'll set her father to watch my lady; she's up to something she didn't ought. They say her face is her fortune; I say as how her face'll be her ruin."

"Will you send her to me this evening, about eight? I want to see her very much."

"Of course I will, Miss Hoxton. It's very good of you to notice such as she, for she ain't the good girl she was."

"I am so sorry," was Gerrie's reply; but mentally she added: "No doubt that is *your* fault. I will try and find out."

And she hurried back to the Hall grounds, but, without entering the house, passed through the small gate on her way to the Rectory.

Sister Grey watched her from her own bedroom window.

"Silly Gerrie," she muttered, "can't find out her friends, or those at any rate most powerful to befriend, but runs first after one and then another of no more use than an old shoe. I would not willingly hurt Gerrie. No one has

ever given me gentler words or sweeter smiles than she. Such an old head on such young shoulders. Poor little Gerrie. I can't help it; circumstances it is that makes one hard, deceitful, cruel, wicked, nothing else but circumstances. It is much easier and pleasanter to be good, which I know to my cost," and she sighed.

Sister Grey was not wicked from choice but necessity, she thought, and a very painful necessity too, in her opinion.

No one was farther from Gerrie's thoughts than Sister Grey, as she walked along the avenue that bright afternoon. It was a step in advance she was about to make, to go with Miss Jewel to discover the best methods of conducting a parish. They were not going to act on their own blind impulses, but with the Rector's own sanction, and under his authority, she and Jessie, for Laura had quite enough to do to take care of her own little person. She still had to submit to certain control, and to continue a course of reading, also to practise on the piano a little, and do no end of fancy work. So she considered her time amply filled without parish

work. She had gone round with petitions for or against Sunday closing, or early closing, and other things, she had also distributed tracts from door to door, occasionally, with her mother; but to her it had been awful drudgery. The unavoidable glimpses into want and penury, or of sickness and pain, were intolerable spectacles. They were not so harrowing to her feelings as they were revolting to her whole nature. She was utterly incompetent to put herself into the place of those in a lower social status. When they were happy, joyous, and independent, they appeared impertinent, and the more correctly they endeavoured to speak the more objectionable they were to the young lady, who then mentally accused them of assuming airs and graces of equality; and when they were miserable, they either distressed or disgusted her.

Jessie was awaiting Gerrie with the pony carriage, for Lutterfield was quite three and a half miles from Broughton. Jessie drove while Johnson rode behind.

On reaching the Vicarage, which was situated in a very narrow street, where a passer-by could

scarcely imagine any but the most dreary scenes behind those sombre walls, the young ladies alighted. A bright-knobbed brass bell summoned a servant, and they were at once admitted into a well-kept lawn. The house itself was of dark red brick, partially covered with ivy. There was no covered porch; the front door was open. Mrs. Price was at home and received them graciously. She was quite pleased to answer their numerous inquiries respecting parish affairs. But Lutterfield being so much larger than Broughton, things could not be conducted quite on the same principles. Their day-schools had a most proficient head teacher, and the discipline was excellent. The Sunday-schools were held morning and afternoon under an able staff of volunteers, and a superintendent for each department. On Monday afternoon a mothers'-meeting, in the evening a Bible class for men; on Tuesday afternoon a Dorcas meeting for the more respectable lady members of the congregation; on Wednesday evening church service, Temperance and other lectures for children; on Thursday, Temperance meetings

for adults; on Friday afternoon visits from district visitors; and every Saturday evening an entertainment for the people, consisting of readings, singing, recitations, and instrumental music. That was the general programme; and to each young lady a magazine was given, in which was printed all important notices concerning the church, monthly meetings, etc.

Presently afternoon tea was brought in, and a few moments later they were joined by the Vicar himself, a tall, slightly-built man, with iron-gray hair, kind blue eyes, and the manners of a knight. After him entered two dear girls and a boy, who chatted prettily, and were evidently the delight of their parents, who were deeply attached to each other.

"Come and see my schools, Miss Jewel, pray do, I am quite proud of them; and you, too, Miss Hoxton. Are you going to enter upon parish duties too? Fortunate Broughton, I should say."

"But we don't know how to begin," replied Jessie; "and we have so very few members of our church, it is so different from Lutterfield."

“Will you take my advice?”

“Oh yes! We came on purpose to ask it.”

“Visit the day-schools first of all. As a rule they are in the most dilapidated condition, but when the Education Act has been in working order half a century, it will effect a revolution in the country.”

“How dreadful!” exclaimed Gerrie. “Not like the French Revolution, will it?”

“Oh, no, no! But a great social revolution—I hope a beneficial one—shedding light, more light, on the dark corners of the country.”

“Papa was greatly opposed to Mr. Forster’s Bill,” said Jessie. “He says it is preposterous to pretend to educate the working classes, it will only unfit them for their lawful occupations.”

“I hope he will live to see the result of the grandest measure for the alleviation of misery that has ever been brought forward in Parliament; because, my dear girl, I think the enjoyment knowledge gives is untold, and ought to be diffused throughout the obscurest village in the land. Books—books read with the understanding—are sources of infinite delight. They make the in-

telligent reader an adventurer, a traveller, a poet, or a philosopher; they introduce him to the very highest situation, the best society, and raise him above the paltry cares of life. But, come, you did not come in for a lecture, and I am on my hobby.”

So they spent a very pleasant hour, without finally determining how to set about reforming their own little world of Broughton. They determined, however, to take the opportunity offered them to see the working of the various meetings carried on in the populous town of Lutterfield. Neither of the girls were strangers there. Jessie had been a day boarder at the best academy of which the town could boast, and had several times attended the beautiful old church, where the music was considered quite the best in the county; where every aisle was softly matted, every seat comfortably cushioned, save only down the middle aisle, where sat the aged poor, or in the dark side-aisles, quite out of sight, for servants and common people. And the windows were of stained glass. Jessie loved the scene—the white-robed choristers, the high vaulted roof, the clergyman

in his white surplice above the dark oaken pulpit. Altogether it had more the appearance of a cathedral than a simple parish church.

Besides, there were so many wealthy people who attended the services.

"And," said Jessie, justly enough, "these rich people can make the working of a church so much easier. In Broughton we see scarcely a carriage at the churchyard gate."

There was no one belonging to the church, however, whose heart did not swell with righteous pride when such an occurrence really took place. The farmers' dog-carts or pony-traps were of more importance than any dissenting chapel could boast, but what were *they* when Mr. and Mrs. Roberts drove up in their open carriage, with two men in front and a footman behind, the handsome pair of chestnuts pawing the ground close to those simply-painted gates; for Broughton had a most unpretentious churchyard. Joe Bannington, sexton, bell-ringer, verger, care-taker, etc., received grandees as if they came to pay him personal respect, and would sing more lustily in their presence than in that of inferior mortals. Even

Mr. Stuart Reid, Justice of the Peace of Ickleford Court, sometime member for the county, was of scarcely any note in comparison to Mr. Roberts, who by dwelling in their midst, and paying the workmen who also spent their earnings chiefly in Broughton, was considered to be the mainstay of the little township. And, indeed, so he was. And he was wonderfully popular. Mr. Stuart Reid had a large family of sons and daughters, and every one was pleased to see him, accompanied by as many as his carriage would contain; but he was not looked upon as a Broughtonian, though he hired his pew every half-year, and, better still, paid for it regularly. But to return to Gerrie. She was expecting Pattie every moment. Pattie had never disappointed her, and yet eight o'clock had struck, and there was no Pattie. What could be the reason? Was she out again; and with such a companion? Gerrie felt her face burn with anxiety. Vernon was playing about the room, examining minutely everything that he had previously been warned not to touch. He saw Gerrie was preoccupied, and determined to take advantage. Suddenly down went an alabaster

candlestick on to the fender, broken to atoms. Up jumped Gerrie with a slight scream.

"Oh, Vernon! you naughty boy, what are you doing there?" for he was not in the least disconcerted.

"It don't matter; what was the use of it? I was only just looking."

"Get down directly, Vernon, you will be breaking something else."

"I shan't get down for you," he answered, as he took up some other choice vase of the same fragile make.

Gerrie did not know what to do, Vernon was quite as strong as herself. It would be worse than useless to struggle with him, and he did so evidently enjoy her state of nervousness.

Presently he got down, moved his chair right in front of the fire, as if to examine the glass-covered timepiece.

"Could I lift it?" said Vernon, with aggravating calmness.

"Oh, you must not. Papa will be so angry at the mischief you have already done. He brought those candlesticks from Rome."

“Did he? Well, he can buy another, he’s lots of money.”

He had scarcely got the words out of his mouth when he fell down on the fender, his outstretched hands unwittingly clutching the hot bars. He began to yell most lustily, bringing both the Squire and Sister Grey on the scene, both of whom rushed to the boy and commenced scolding Gerrie. As they both entered simultaneously they must have come from the same neighbourhood.

“You are of no more use than a baby,” exclaimed the Squire, whose voice could scarcely be heard above the screams of his precious son and heir.

Gerrie drew herself up; she neither cried nor protested, but was going to explain when Sister Grey, for the first time, turned round upon her passionately.

“You don’t care if he is killed—why should you? He only stands in your way. Poor fellow! As if he could help that! How did you fall, my darling?”

Vernon struggled and screamed; he wanted

to go to Gerrie, he would not let Sister Grey hold him as he danced with his poor, tortured fingers.

“Gerrie! oh, Gerrie! I want Gerrie! Oh, my hands, my hands!”

“Send for the doctor, Kate,” said the distracted Squire, “such burns may cripple him for life.”

Full of tender compassion, and forgetting the injustice she had endured, Gerrie knelt down by Vernon and drew his hands so that she could see them. The fingers appeared drawn down; he could or would not open them, though he continued his terrible cries of pain.

“Put them in water,” he screamed; and his father went to the door, where stood Pattie, the very model of a sweet, innocent country girl. Indeed, she looked more charming than ever, and attracted an admiring gaze from the Squire himself.

“Oh, Pattie! my brother has burnt himself so dreadfully.”

“Wrap him up in sweet oil and flour, Miss Gerrie, it ’ll fetch the fire out sooner than anything. Shall I fetch it from t’ kitchen?”

“Do, Pattie! I am so glad to see you.”

Pattie went, and presently returned to the still sobbing boy, accompanied by Bolton, who carried him off to the kitchen, declaring that the flour and stuff would make such a mess. Thither the Squire and Sister Grey also betook themselves, and Gerrie and Pattie were left alone in the drawing-room, the only bright room in the house. Pattie did not attempt to sit down. It was not homage to Gerrie's person that made her so shy, but to her surroundings. The large well-curtained windows, the rich upholstering of the springed furniture, the Chippendale chairs, the *bric-à-brac*, the mirrors, the piano, and tiny tables loaded with beautiful articles, inspired Pattie with unfeigned reverence. To live like that, to possess such valuable things, to be dressed so sweetly, and to look so pretty, was life—real, beautiful life.

“Sit down, Pattie, because I want to have a long chat with you.”

“Them chairs is too grand for the likes of me.”

“Why, how can they be? They are only made of wood.”

"And tapestry, or 'broidery, I don't know what; but they are a fine sight too good to make use on."

How Gerrie laughed!

"Why, Pattie, they are not half so bright or so wonderful as the green sods I was on to-day."

"Don't you think so? My! don't I! I'd a long sight have your carpet than all t' green fields i' Broughton."

"Would you really, though, Pattie? You will get a house of your own some day, and if I am rich enough I will give you such a nice carpet for it, and lots of things, if only I like the man you are going to marry."

Pattie stood midway between the fire and the door. She did not attempt to advance, and made no response to Gerrie's kind offer.

Gerrie wanted very much to reach Pattie's heart, and never could feel quite sure that she did. She went towards her and drew her near the fire, and then gently placed a chair and insisted upon her sitting down.

"You don't care for Miss Gerrie much now, Pattie!"

"Don't I? Then I don't care for nobbody."

This was reassuring.

"Don't you care for any one better than me, Pattie?"

"No, and niver shall, Miss Gerrie." For Pattie did not know.

"I am very glad you don't; but, of course, you may some day. The other day I thought I saw you in Eastwood with some one. Was it you?"

Pattie went red, and then very, very white.

"I see it was," said Gerrie, simply. "Tell me who it is, Pattie, because we have been such friends."

"Don't you know, Miss Gerrie? Oh, I wish you did, I do, I do."

"Tell me, then I shall; and I will never tell."

"I durstn't, Miss Gerrie—not for my life I durstn't. Oh, please don't tell any one—please don't, or I shall catch it." And Pattie commenced crying almost as lustily as Vernon had been doing.

Gerrie promised solemnly to keep the secret that Pattie never told.

CHAPTER XI.

Two things caused Gerrie a sleepless night—two anxieties. Her father had called Sister Grey “Kate” quite plainly in her hearing, and that he never had done before. That was one thing; and Pattie still kept her secret from her, that was the other. These were veritable troubles.

“Kate”—Sister Grey “Kate!” Who could she be, or what had she become, to have produced such intimacy? Gerrie was indignant. Familiarity was always objectionable to both Jessie and Gerrie. They could not be without a certain amount of reserve even to those best beloved, nay, to those they loved least was the most reverence felt and shown. But the familiarity of nicknames, of practical jokes, and personal contacts, were odious between such people as her father and Sister Grey. Gerrie felt herself injured;

and when she met the two at breakfast they both felt that Gerrie was annoyed, perhaps suspicious.

"Jessie is coming this afternoon, papa, to hear me read German." As she said this she turned her eyes on Sister Grey, who she wished would take a hint more than ever.

She was astounded at the expression on that lady's face. It had turned almost purple, then went ghastly white; but no word or exclamation passed her lips.

The Squire never glanced at her, he was reading his morning paper, and continued doing so unmoved. Gerrie was quite uncertain whether he heard her remark, but felt instinctively that the information had distressed the poor creature she was so anxious should be dismissed.

But Gerrie was never thoughtless, never unfeeling; that look of almost agony touched her heart, not her irony. She became silent, and in her turn more troubled. Then, as a happy relief, poor Vernon came in with his hands well kept from mischief. He also bore signs of suffering on his young face, so generally steeped in roguery only. He ran to Gerrie.

"They don't hurt now, Gerrie; but they did awful, awful! It was not your fault a bit, as cross old Sister said, it was nobody's fault, but the stupid old chair's."

"And stupid Vernie for getting on the chair, eh?"

The Squire had put down his paper and called his boy to him, who went somewhat reluctantly, simply because he had been called, and to obey was detestable to him, though he would have liked to exact obedience from everybody else.

"You should not call Sister Grey cross, Vernon," said Gerrie. "She does a great deal too much for you, doesn't she, papa?"

"He gives a great deal too much trouble," replied the father. "The young scamp! What were you going to do in that chair?"

"Zamining everything," said the boy.

"Did you want to find out if they were genuine? The clock, and candelabras, and vases?"

"That is just what I did," replied Vernon, "and what harm was there in that, if nothing had fell?"

"But you broke a very valuable article."

"Not on purpose; but I would just like to break somefin." And he pointed to Sister Grey's huge cross.

But Gerrie was very angry with her brother, and talked to him and scolded him a great deal to try and bring him to a better frame of mind. It was all in vain. Gerrie was sorry for the unfortunate Sister, who all the morning wore a wretchedly-aggrieved expression of face, and at last she ventured to say:

"You must not be offended because Miss Jewel is so kind as to help me in some of my most difficult lessons. You know, dear, we are not very rich, and if we had another governess altogether, you could not remain here, nor if I went to school."

"But you want me to go, Gerrie, I am not blind; tell me the truth."

Gerrie was sorely perplexed, and Sister Grey continued:

"I have been happy here, happier and sadder than I have ever been in my life; but I was mad, mad to come, perhaps wicked. I am not sure—no, not sure—but if I went away, you would do as well without me."

"With Jessie I might, but not if you were miserable, Sister Grey. I couldn't bear any one to be unhappy through me. What little bit I can do in the world I want to be only kind; so kiss me and trust me."

"Don't fetch Miss Jewel here, then."

"Really, I can't help that. *She is coming*, and she is sweet and good, and we are going to begin parish work."

"Is she very religious?"

"Yes, and very kind. I know you will like her."

"If she is religious, she is sure to be hateful."

"Indeed, no. Do be quite happy, Sister Grey."

"And you don't want me to go, Gerrie? I have been good to you; I have loved you very much. That is one reason I don't want to go. There are so few people in the world one *can* love, and I have no other home."

"Poor Sister," said Gerrie, "it is very pleasant to be loved. I must do all I can to make you happier, and so will Jessie. You must not grieve about Vernon, he will grow wiser."

"He'll never be good like you, Gerrie—never, never."

"Better, I hope; so much better. We must find a better way to teach him while he is so young."

"We can't expect anything better. It'll be all no good."

"Why? Surely no one need despair of such a little fellow."

"I do quite," replied the Sister, in a tone of serious despondency. "You see his parents were so—but what am I saying——"

"Something about my parents. What about *them*?"

"Well, Gerrie, his mother was distracted before he was born. But I am not at liberty to give you any particulars."

"Poor, dear mamma! I cannot imagine her distracted about anything. She seemed as if nothing in the world could distract her. She was so calm, so quiet and undemonstrative."

"You miss her very much, Gerrie. It is sad for so young a girl to be motherless."

"Sad, indeed!" replied Gerrie. "But Jessie will do her best to help me."

“And can I do nothing, dear?”

“Yes, indeed! Of course you can. But, you see, we have a different faith, and that makes a gap between us.”

“If I joined your Church, would you care more for me?”

“No, indeed! If you could change your faith to please me, you could have no faith at all, and that would be worse.” Sister Grey sighed, and turned her head, perhaps to hide her tears of disappointment, for she could not fail to see that the only bond between her and Gerrie was pure pity.

Jessie stayed to tea, and the Squire exerted himself to be agreeable and fascinating. To Gerrie he seemed almost another man, and, moreover, most charming. She was not surprised to see that Sister Grey appeared depressed. Never had the Squire shone in her society as he did now, never was so brilliant or so gentle. Gerrie thought that, if anything, they ought to be kinder to the poor dependent who had no other home, than to the young lady who had so much.

She put her considering cap on her brow, which contracted it somewhat, and made the violet eyes beneath dreamy or tearful. As compensation, she devoted herself to Sister Grey, played backgammon with her, and tried to converse; but it was of no use, Sister Grey could not collect her scattered thoughts. Not for a moment could she centre them on the game. She was straining every nerve to hear what the Squire and his companion were talking about. And Gerrie observed her anxiety. It troubled her sorely. She was scarcely fifteen, and had little notion of what love affairs could mean. So she charitably put Sister Grey's evident fears down as affecting her position as governess, not to any deeper feeling.

"Miss Jewel is rich, isn't she?" whispered Sister Grey.

"Oh, no, I think not," replied Gerrie.

A momentary gleam of satisfaction suffused the Sister's face.

"Of course, if she were rich, she would not teach you," she replied.

"Indeed, I think she would. Miss Jewel loves

work for its own sake. If she did not teach me she would be teaching some one else."

"She has a peculiar taste, then."

"Of course, she is altogether peculiar; and you think I am too, don't you?"

"Perhaps, after all, I am the most peculiar of you all. We are all what Fate makes us," replied Sister Grey.

"Oh, no! Look at the second Miss Jewel. How very different she is!"

"The difference could be accounted for, I have no doubt."

"God makes no two creatures alike. Isn't that wonderful?" said Gerrie.

"But come, Gerrie, it isn't fair that you should give all your attention to poor me. Go and talk to your father and friend."

Sister Grey was not quite disinterested. She was anxious to disturb that apparently interesting conversation. Gerrie was too innocent to be suspicious. She went over to the little table where the Squire was trying to teach Jessie cribbage.

Presently Sister Grey came, too, with a cold, rigid, religious demeanour.

"I thought Miss Jewel would never play cards, especially now she is about to devote herself to a religious life."

"We are not going to make any new commandments, Sister Grey. I cannot say with the young ruler that I have kept all the old ones yet. They are as much as I can ever hope to attain."

"Did not Christ say: 'Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world'?"

"Certainly; but He could not have meant cards, because they were not invented. Besides, one does not love such things. That text has been twisted into a thousand different forms, and people are still doing what Christ plainly meant them *not* to do. They are more afraid of the appearance of evil than the evil itself. There is no evil in cards, I am convinced."

"Of course not," said the Squire; "mere idle, senseless prejudice."

"What says Gerrie?" asked Jessie.

"Why, the same as my Minerva. Cards are merely cards, bits of paper, and can amuse and never hurt."

"Many a soul has been lost through card-playing," replied Sister Grey, anxious to annoy or terrify.

"Never, never; the abuse of them may have done so. As we play, and as the inventor intended them to be played, there is amusement only, and no evil."

"And what is more," added the Squire, warmly, "we will have no evil insinuated where everything here is purity and innocence. Come, Sister Grey, away with that prudery, and let us have a cheerful game at whist. *You* can play as well as any one."

He looked up in her face with a persuasive expression of countenance, that she could not withstand.

The Squire and Sister Grey cut for partners, and sat *vis-à-vis*, to the Sister's evident delight. It was a joy to Gerrie to see another's joy, and added immensely to the pleasure of the evening; moreover, she could not help remarking how much handsomer Catherine Grey looked when happy and interested, as was then apparently the case. How her eyes brightened, and became wonderfully

tender; how her language improved, almost amounting to eloquence!

“Poor Sister Grey!” thought Jessie. “How dull a dreary, monotonous existence makes one! Surely friend sharpens the face of friend; and the Squire cannot be a bad man, when he is so very affable to poor dependents.”

Gerrie went to her own room. She was tired and yet restless. She had told Pattie to call for *dress*, and Pattie had not come. That meant that Pattie *could* not come, for if there was anything for which Pattie would dare fire or water, it was dress in any shape. But what could have kept her away? No trifle. Some positive, stern necessity, and Gerrie wanted much to learn the cause. She had on her dressing-gown, and believing every one in bed but nursie or Bolton, she stole out of her room on to the landing and listened. She had no candle. The broad, oak staircase looked very cavernous as she leant over the banisters; but she heard voices proceeding from the dining-room or library, not from the kitchen. Could Pattie have come even so late as that? Had she better listen, or go down and

see! Her imagination was so keen, a thousand terrors were conjured up in a moment. She ran down, fastening her girdle on the way, and proceeded to the room from whence the sounds issued.

But her steps were arrested by a bitter cry. Her heart stood still with fright. All around her was pitch dark; Jones had extinguished the hall lamp, and the door was closed of the room which contained the victim that had just uttered that pitiful cry. Gerrie was quite unable to decide to what kind of individual the voice belonged, whether to man, woman, or child; but she knew it was a cry of distress, pain, or terror. She dared not venture further, for she heard her father's step, his well-known angry step; she heard him bang the heavy chairs down, and mutter a passionate oath. No, she felt intuitively that it was not her father who had made that exclamation, but was rather the cause of it. She dared not confront him in that mood, so she crept back as softly as she descended, and got into bed. She was filled with indescribable fears. Many prayers she made for the father who, with

all his faults, known and unknown to her, was nevertheless beloved, and, alas! so lovable.

She strained her auricular powers to their utmost tension to hear him come upstairs; but it was of no avail. The house had relapsed into utter silence. "I will go to Sister Grey," she exclaimed at last, out loud, as if it were a kind of threat to some unseen obstacle. Her candle was still burning. She jumped up, and putting on her dressing-gown, and over that a shawl, she once more left her room. She had to go down a long corridor, and to creep very softly for fear of arousing other slumberers. Her father's room was on the left wing of the house, Sister Grey's on the right near the school-room, but away from the servants. Gerrie reached the door, stood still, and listened. Thankful she felt to find that here there was life. Through the key-hole a light glimmered. Poor Sister Grey! what kept her awake so long? Gerrie gave a gentle knock. There was no verbal response; but in a moment the door was opened, and Gerrie stood face to face with what she momentarily believed to be an apparition. A woman stood before her of the

same size and proportions as those possessed by Sister Grey; but there the likeness terminated. Where were the dark braids from out the snowy cap? Where the dark-pencilled eyebrows, the dark, heavy eyes, the pale olive skin? All vanished! The Sister's cap was not there; instead of dark braids a mass of thick, fair hair hanging down her back, while her eyes were blazing with almost unearthly excitement, and cheeks of crimson hue.

"Good God!" cried the stranger. "Why are you here? Fly for your life!"

At first Gerrie felt inclined to obey the injunction. Then a sudden calm fell upon her, a strength, too, of mind and body to find out what this meant.

"Who are you?" she replied. "You have the voice of Sister Grey; and, as my mother is gone, I must take her place, and know all who dwell in my father's house."

So saying she entered the room, sat down on the nearest chair, and fixed her eyes steadily on the dismantled figure before her.

"Oh, Gerrie, Gerrie, spare me!"

"Spare you! Why are you disguising yourself so at this time of night? Tell me all about it."

"I am now my true self, Gerrie. Oh, don't say you don't like me as well. Look at me and see if you could not love Catherine Grey as much as Sister Grey."

Gerrie looked at her quietly from top to toe; in fact, coolly criticised her without answering.

"You are like no one else in the world, Gerrie," said the woman.

Still no answer.

"Am I hideous? Do you hate me?" cried the strange woman. Then she knelt down and looked up into the young girl's face.

Gerrie *felt* she was beautiful, far, far more beautiful than Sister Grey had ever been, and believing in the imploring look and cry, she replied:

"I can't understand this at all. Explain."

"If I did I should make you more unhappy than you have ever been yet, and I cannot see any good I could possibly do you or myself, or I would; but, Gerrie, I am a better woman at this

moment than I have been these many years, and I want you to promise me something."

"Nothing!" replied Gerrie, firmly; "nothing until I understand this mystery."

"Then, dear, I have only one thing to say, and that is, for your own peace of mind and that of your father and brother, never say what you have discovered. It will lead only to miserable revelations. I am going to try and forgive. My love for you helps me, and my loathing and contempt for the wickedness of others. It would be better to die than to grow as bad as the best are capable of becoming. Will you help me to be good, Gerrie?"

"What can I do?" said poor Gerrie, steeped in mystery.

"Get me money. Help me to leave this house before breakfast. I want at least five pounds. You shall know where to send for me if I am ever wanted, if ever I can be of service to you or yours. Will you do this?"

The girl hesitated. She was considering. Was this a real opportunity of doing good, of helping another to be good, or was she going to be

cheated, and really lend a hand to something unworthy? She looked at Sister Grey, who still knelt before her with an expression of keenest suffering on her face, and yet so gentle. Poor Gerrie began to cry. In her turn her heart warmed strangely to this woman; she felt she had been wronged in some way, and she trusted her. And suddenly giving way to a generous feeling of affection, she clasped her arms round her neck and kissed her. Sister Grey sobbed—Sister Grey no longer, however, not even the garb of a Sister.

“Shall you go into a convent, Sister?” asked Gerrie.

“No, no, darling. I am going to London.”

“May I write to you?”

“Promise secrecy, or I dare not let you.”

“Oh, I will say nothing. That can do no harm. No one will ask me.”

“Very well. You know where Vansdale is, don't you?”

“Quite well; it is miles past the Lodge.”

“Yes, there four lanes meet. You must take the one to the right; it is rather steep; if you are anxious to hear of me you will not mind that. On

the left-hand side stands a solitary cottage, white-washed, a very, very tumble-down place, but so hidden from the road, and the road itself so unfrequented that it is a veritable shelter. If you want to hear from me or of me, go there."

"Who lives there?"

"Old Mrs. Rawson. You will like her, and she is as safe as the grave."

"All alone?"

"She has one daughter with her, poor Sally, half an imbecile, who has been more wronged than myself. There is nothing to fear there, nothing; so you may safely call and make the acquaintance of the dearest old woman in the country. Now, when can you let me have the money?"

"Not till I see what I have got. I'm afraid it is not much. I am rather extravagant, and five pounds is more than I have ever had yet. But I will get it somehow; I will ask papa."

"Run and see what you have yourself."

Trusting Gerrie did as she was asked, and came back with £1 3s. 6d., which she had been diligently saving for months, every farthing of which she put in Catherine Grey's hand.

“Oh, thank you, you dear little soul, the kindest and truest I have ever met. Know that but for love of you and your sweet kindness and example I might—oh, what might I not be? But you have saved me, darling; you have trusted and believed in me, and by saving one poor sinner from despair, you have already some reward. Kiss me, Gerrie, and believe me when I swear to you that I have been more sinned against than sinning.”

“But I don’t *know*, Sister,” said Gerrie, dubiously.

“Hush! Don’t say Sister—how I hate that word—I would almost rather be called fiend or devil—say Kate.”

“Well, Kate, I feel, though I don’t know, that there is ever so much good in you, and if you had only been genuine all the time you had been here, instead of acting, I should have loved you so much.”

“Had I been genuine, dear, I could not possibly have been here. I was compelled to act. But I am sick to death of it. It has all been a farce—deceit from beginning to end, making life a hell. Indeed, hell could not be worse than the torment

one can feel down here. But you have not kissed me, Gerrie."

"But I will," and so she did, tenderly and compassionately, and Kate rose up erect, with a conscious pride in the determination she had made being right and worthy of the approbation of the innocent girl whose friendship she felt she valued more than she could express.

Then she hurried with her toilet, combed out her long masses of hair, and twisted them on the top of her head. She had a beautiful, long, white throat, which had a peculiar bend in it when she turned her head. Suddenly she snatched off the bed her white head-gear, collars, and cuffs, and set them on fire, throwing them on the grate to smoulder.

"Hateful reminders of a hated rôle!" she cried.

"But you told me you had been happy here."

"So I have; happy, buoyed up with false hopes; happy, too, in having found one true heart. But now I am happier because I have restored my own self-respect. That is a tower

of strength. Oh, Gerrie, Gerrie, *never*, NEVER part with that!"

"I often quite despise myself now," said Gerrie.

"You have no need, dearest. Oh, that I were like you!" And she bent what was really a beautiful head, and kissed the upturned face.

But Gerrie was cold and weary, and Catherine Grey insisted on her going to bed. When she got up next morning, the inconsistent Sister had departed no one knew whither.

CHAPTER XII.

THE Squire was decidedly puzzled the next morning. First, at the non-appearance of Sister Grey; secondly, at the peculiar expression of Gerrie's face, half wondering, slightly deprecating; again, at Vernon's manifest delight at the vacant chair. He alone spoke unreservedly.

"Where's she gone? Nurse says her rooms are all sixes and sevens. Her box is gone, too; and who could carry that? Not Sister Grey, she had no muscles."

That was indeed a perplexity to Gerrie. Who could have removed the trunk? Rather a heavy one, too. Still her father made no remark, so she addressed Vernon:

"You don't know that it is gone, or that *she* is gone. Perhaps she is now somewhere in the village. What do you think, pa?"

“How on earth can I account for women’s freaks?” he replied, petulantly. “They are persistently unaccountable, and one ceases to be astonished.”

Gerrie’s thoughts wandered back to her mother, to her simple life, so meek, so loving to him; with a temper, though fretful, never excitable; and as for a freak, as incompetent to perform such a thing, as to be guilty of a misdemeanour. Where, then, could her father have known such sort of women? Was it from her aunts? These aunts rarely came into Broughton; when they did they always seemed to make such a fuss and put her poor mother into such a flurry. She hoped they would not take it into their heads to come and see after her, or to superintend the household arrangements.

Vernon could never be awed; even a sound slap had not that desirable effect. He continued:

“Can’t I just do something nice this morning? Sister Grey was a regular plague; fidgety old thing! with that beast of a cap. Didn’t you hate it, Gerrie—didn’t you?”

“Hold your tongue!” cried his father, in a

voice of thunder. Vernon did not speak, but filled his mouth with toast. Then, seeing his father's face was hidden behind his paper, he made faces and signs to Gerrie.

Breakfast over, he asked if he might go to the farm-yard.

"Be off anywhere out of sight and hearing," was the ungracious permission, of which Vernon immediately took advantage, and made himself scarce.

"Is Jessie coming this morning?" asked the Squire.

"No, papa, only in the afternoon."

"Then you must teach Vernon in the morning, till I find him a school."

"Yes, papa, if he will let me," said Gerrie.

"Curiously, he likes you better than he did——" He did not finish the sentence, but walked out of the room, evidently rather uneasy in his mind, at the same time was more repellent than usual, and Gerrie could not speak to him further. She went up to Sister Grey's room and looked round. In the grate were a few ashes of the white portion of her disguise. Her

bed had never been occupied, but was in an unusually untidy state; one of her old black dresses was hanging on one end. The beads were on the dressing-table with the large cross; of those, Gerrie took possession, thinking they might be of some value, and she might restore them. Some writing-paper was torn up into shreds; there was nothing to indicate her further identity. But Broughton Hall would know her no more. Gerrie felt she should miss her; the dismantled room was saddening, so she did not linger, but betook herself to Bolton in the kitchen regions.

“Well, Miss Gerrie, here’s a rum go! Didn’t I always say as she was no good with her long hypocritical face, as two-faced an article as ever breathed? I wonder who on earth has ever made off wi’ sich a body. Somebody that is of *her* feather, I reckon, else how could her box be gone?”

“Now, Bolton, don’t be cross. She’s gone. Let us remember her only at her best.”

“Her best fiddlestick! What was her best? She had no best, Miss Gerrie, dear, and had no right to be i’ t’ same house wi’ you.”

"She was always kind to me; but I won't talk about her. Did Pattie come last night, Bolton?"

"Bless yer life, there's another of yer favorites. Getting as good-for-nothing a lass as can well be found, I'm told."

"You always hear some shocking tale, Bolton. Don't talk against my friends, please, it gives me the heart-ache."

"You are fair soft, Miss Gerrie, and don't know yer friends."

"You always said that," replied Gerrie, "and I prove you are wrong by being soft over you! And you are my friend, aren't you?"

"Not worth much," replied Bolton, much mollified, "but I may be better than I seem."

"I shall just go to Atkins and make inquiries," said Gerrie, quietly. "Master Vernon is somewhere about the yard."

She ran and fetched her head-gear—a large brown hat and blue Shetland shawl. Gerrie was fond of blue in all shades.

On reaching Pattie's house she found her friend with sleeves tucked up, hard at household

work, while Jacob sat at the table busy with pen or pencil.

Gerrie was surprised to find he was not at work.

"I've left the pits, Miss Gerrie," he said, standing before her with his great poet's eyes glowing with excitement; "next Monday I am going to help Mr. Bingham in the school, and if I pass the Government Examination in December I shall be a pupil-teacher, and soon a master."

"Oh, how nice, Jacob! and I know you will succeed. Perhaps you will be the master here, for poor old Mr. Bingham is getting very old."

"Yes, he wanted help, so I am set on by Dr. Jewel and the managers. I believe I have to thank your pa."

"But I am so glad, I always said you were too good to be buried down a coal-pit; and your poor mother grieved so about it."

"Master Arthur thinks he is none too good," exclaimed Pattie. "How can *he* be?"

"But Master Arthur is no common collier, Pattie, he is to be a mining engineer, you know."

"He gets black, anyway," replied the girl.

"He is none the worse for that," said Jacob. "It isn't the getting black, it's the longing to be with books that makes it so hard for me."

"Mr. Arthur likes books too, don't he?" said Pattie.

"Oh, he—he knows so much and thinks so much, that he has a library in his head, I believe," said Gerrie. "That I do."

"Yes, he's awful clever, miss."

"What are you doing, Jacob?" she continued, going near the table.

"Making a map, Miss Gerrie. They are very particular about such work at the Normal Schools, that and arithmetic."

"I am sure you have done it like print; and how beautifully you write, just like copperplate!"

Had Jacob been her equal Gerrie would not have spoken so plainly or so approvingly; but to the poor she was always gracious, and what pride she possessed she bestowed upon those who were too conscious of their own superiority.

Then she turned to Pattie and inquired why she had not come to the Hall.

Pattie went very red, and then an expression of wrath, sullen wrath, settled on her else beautiful face.

"It was *her* fault," she said, intimating whom by pointing with her finger to the back premises.

"Why doesn't she like you to come to me?"

"She telled my father a lot of tales, and, and——"

"What, Pattie?"

"He hit me wi' t' strap, and I'll never forgive him, I won't."

"Your father hit you—*you*, Pattie! Oh, how could he?" cried Gerrie.

"He did, and all to please her; and what has she to do wi' me?"

"Hush! she will hear thee, lass, and there'll be another row," whispered Jacob.

"I don't care if there's fifty," replied the girl; "they may have them to themselves. Is it true as how Sister Grey's gone, Miss Gerrie?"

"Yes, she is. She came mysteriously and has left mysteriously."

"Was she a thief?"

"Oh, dear no! Sometimes I think she must have been in a different position. She was very nice sometimes, and I shall miss her a good deal."

"You've a good word for iverybody, Miss Gerrie—you'll speak up for me when I want yer, won't you?"

"Always, Pattie, you know I shall."

"Pattie's lucky in having such a friend as you, Miss Gerrie. I often tell her so, and wish you were my friend, too."

Poor Jacob! he blushed the deepest red, and put up his hand to brush away the drooping hair from that great broad brow, and marvelled at his audacity.

Gerrie blushed too. She had always felt a friendship for Jacob, awkward as he often appeared, when he used to draw her about in an invalid's carriage and stop to pick her some way-side flower. Yes, she had always felt herself his friend, and almost lamented that he was not a girl, that she might give him proofs of her interest as well as his sister.

Suddenly Jacob looked up and saw the half-bashful, timid look on her face.

"Oh, Miss Gerrie! you aren't vexed, are you?"

"No, Jacob, not at all. But—but I am your friend, too. If you are mine you will send Pattie to me when I ask her, and always take her part to her father, because you know she has no mother now, any more than I have."

"You're right there. What we call mother now is as hard as nails. She's gone down the garden, and is talking to some one o'er t' wall. She don't know as how you's here, Miss Gerrie."

"Then I will go before she finds out. Have you seen Master Vernon?"

"He's in the stable," said Jacob, jumping up; "shall I fetch him for you, the yard is so dirty?"

"Thank you," said Gerrie, following Jacob, who gave a peculiar whistle at the door and brought a farm labourer.

"Master Vernon is wanted—now this minute."

But Vernon was ankle deep in the mess and mud, and refused to leave his delightful occupation among the horses. That "beast," Sister Grey,

had gone ; and now Gerrie wanted to be a beast. He shouldn't, he wouldn't come.

Gerrie knew she was not strong enough to make him, and she could not bear so soon asserting a stern authority ; so Vernon was conqueror, and Gerrie returned to what now appeared a gloomy hall. She scarcely knew how to occupy her time ; her mind was both anxious and worried, her father was out, the servants were all engaged in their own occupations, and she appeared to herself the most useless of created beings, born for the express purpose of being idle. She positively envied the domestics, the labourers, and especially the national schoolmistress, in their daily work.

Suddenly Jones appeared with a delicate note on a Japanese tray. It was from Jessie. Mrs. Price had written to invite both girls to a Dorcas meeting that afternoon. The weather was cold, clear, but grey. Jessie advised walking instead of driving, but asked Gerrie's wish on the subject. So Gerrie, with restored animation, sent a line in reply, and then sat down to her music for an hour.

Her father appeared at dinner, still silent and

moody. Nurse had had much trouble with Vernon, who at last came in late and looked naughty and defiant at Gerrie.

His father was too preoccupied to notice anything. Jones paid the boy particular attention, in order to keep the peace for Miss Gerrie; but Vernon fidgeted and showed impatience by playing with his glass, jingling it with his dessert spoon.

"Don't, dear Vernon," whispered Gerrie.

"Shall," was the rude answer.

"Be quiet, sir," said the Squire, at last, as if suddenly aroused to a knowledge of his existence. "What lessons have you done this morning?"

"Lots, with Tom Johnson," he replied, promptly. "He let me curry old Toby, and fetch some hay for the dun cow, and carry some water."

"Well, that won't hurt you; but, I mean with Gerrie."

Vernon went on eating his cut-up meat as if he would choke himself, then he drank some water and coughed enough to frighten anybody into fits.

"All his craft!" thought imperturbable Jones, who came and slapped him somewhat heavily on the back.

"Papa, dear, I am going to Lutterfield Vicarage this afternoon with Jessie, to a Dorcas meeting," said Gerrie, after silence was secured.

"A Dorcas meeting! What on earth is that?" said the Squire.

"Something connected with the parish. I think it is a sewing-class for the poor. You know Jessie is anxious to set our parish aflame."

"Nothing like a bit of slander for that," returned the Squire. "I suppose these religious meetings give the first impetus. I am quite sure a girl not yet fifteen can wait a little longer before she is initiated into such freemasonry."

"Mayn't I go?" she asked, wistfully. "It will be such a nice walk with Jessie."

"Oh, you may go; but bring her back here with you. The evenings are so confoundedly dull. What is to be done with Vernon?"

That was a perplexing question.

"I will look after him, sir," said Jones. "I shall have time to teach him to ride a bit, and

I have one or two places to go to, and he can go with me if you like, sir."

"Very well, Jones. Keep a keen eye on him; there is no mischief beyond his endeavours."

"That's jolly of Jones," said Vernon, appreciatively, for there was nothing more delightful to the boy than a horse.

Jessie and Gerrie had a pleasant walk. The former had heard of the disappearance of Sister Grey, and hoped that Gerrie would be able to enlighten her; but Gerrie was very reticent. She merely related the facts and the conjectures others had made in her hearing. She felt bound to make no revelation, even to her friend, and she spoke so wisely that Jessie never imagined there was anything more to tell.

On their way they met Mr. John Roberts in a very high dog-cart. He stopped to speak to them, and cast equally admiring glances on them both, which neither returned.

"I don't know why, but I detest Mr. Roberts," said Gerrie, with unusual warmth. "He looks so sleek, so fat and well-fed, such a comfortable kind of animal."

Jessie laughed. "Well, Gerrie, that is just what we all are—mere animals."

"Oh, I am sure we are not. You are not, that I do know."

"Yes, we are animals, but something infinitely more."

"But Mr. Roberts seems like an animal without the 'infinitely more,' and I think such men ought to be in stables. I like Jacob Atkins a million times better. I would rather eat with him or talk to him—I would, Jessie. Don't be shocked, but I can't help it."

"I understand what you mean, Gerrie."

"Perhaps Vernon will grow up like that, and I shall loathe him. Oh, Jessie, Jessie, I can't teach that boy, he will worry my life out. He is just like a wild Indian by nature, and he hates learning to be civilised."

"Most boys hate restraint," said Jessie, "but some one ought to manage him."

"I wonder if you could."

"I wonder, too."

So they chatted on till they reached Lutterfield. It was an old straggling town, with a huge

market-place, surrounded by good shops. It could boast a Town Hall, a Mechanics' Institute, a Grammar School, and several churches. The Vicarage was situated in the oldest and therefore the narrowest thoroughfare.

They found the pleasant drawing-room full of ladies, or, at any rate, people who dressed like ladies, all pleasantly greeting each other, and conversing in groups. Presently they all sat down to plain needlework, the materials being provided by some charitable society. Conversation never flagged until Miss Vaughan, who was considered an excellent reader, opened "Daisy Chain," and, with a clear voice and pleasant intonation, enthralled her listeners. At the most interesting passages work made little progress, for with some minds it is impossible to divide attention. Gerrie was quite unable to backstitch neatly while absorbed in Ethel May's Utopian schemes, as she would have been while witnessing a play from Shakespeare. To others neither the one nor the other would be half so engrossing as the neatest of stitches they were making on a piece of calico. As soon as the clock struck five work was folded.

up and cleared away, when tea was brought in by an elderly domestic, and handed round with cake and bread and butter. This they all seemed pleased to enjoy, and conversation flowed freely on the work done or the subjects raised by the reading. It was altogether a pleasant afternoon, still further enhanced by the entrance of their much-loved Vicar, who came in and drank his cup of tea standing, as gentlemen invariably do, with his broad back to the mantelpiece.

There was nothing of a religious nature about this Dorcas meeting; no psalm singing, no Bible reading, no praying. It was all sociable and enjoyable; and many of them knew they were all working for the poor whom their Common Master had left to them as His own legacy. And for Him they were doing it, and the consciousness of this fact brightened their faces and cheered their hearts. The more deeply they thought about this fact the less they felt inclined to talk about it; as people who lay down their lives for their friends are most reticent about their sacrifices.

But they were not all so. Some expressed

their delight in thus working "for the Lord," and considered it some special act of devotion.

Not so Jessie or Gerrie.

"Quite a pleasant afternoon, wasn't it?" said Jessie. "As good as a croquet-party, but with a much grander end."

"Quite. I wish we could begin one; but whom could we ask? There is not such a muster of ladies in all Broughton."

"They were not more than half of them ladies. There was Alice Brown and Kate Crawford, both butchers' daughters."

"And Mrs. Gregg who keeps that inn on Wattie Green."

"Fancy an innkeeper!" exclaimed Gerrie.

"A very proper person, I consider; for her inn, though she is a widow, is noted for its comfort and orderly character. Even Regie has taken refreshment there, and you know he is pretty fastidious. He was quite struck with the rules stuck about the walls. No bad language, no swearing is allowed, no brawling or disputes, no drunkenness. It is a model of what a public-house ought to be; and she prospers too. Strangers

can get a cup of tea better and cheaper at the 'Stag Inn' than at any confectioner's. I declare I would not mind going myself."

Gerrie laughed, and asked Jessie if she was going to have no temperance meetings in her new parish schemes.

"Of course, *real* temperance meetings. Arthur wants them very much, and will conduct them himself. He is an original; but he is thorough—one in a thousand, Gerrie—and will carve out an unbeaten track for himself at whatever cost," said Jessie.

"He is not a Radical, is he?" asked Gerrie.

"He is radically true; but if he is considered a revolutionist, a leveller down, that he is not. No; as the term is now used, I am certain he is no Radical. He would level up."

They were just passing through another small village which lay between Lutterfield and Broughton, seemingly a most forlorn, God-forsaken place.

There was an old church, surrounded by a churchyard filled with white and grey headstones. Some of the windows of the dilapidated chapel were broken. Even in such a battered condition

it had a picturesque appearance. There was no habitable house near that could have been mistaken for a parsonage or rectory.

“The very sight of a church has a humanising effect,” said Gerrie; “but this seems a church without a parson, or even any schools. Is it in our parish?”

“Yes; and is quite an eyesore to most of us. Father feels it is quite beyond his power to work it up. There is a school kept by old Mrs. Shorthouse. Such a fat, dirty old creature! She assures you she has seen better days, and, as one cannot imagine worse, her assertions may be true. Like Ethel May, we ought to do something for Whitburn. There is service in the afternoon. Shall we come some day?”

“I should like to do so very much.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE Squire insisted upon seeing Jessie home; and scarcely had the door closed upon them, than Pattie appeared. She had been waiting in the kitchen a considerable time.

"Well, Pattie, dear, so you have come! I don't think your father will ever be so harsh to you again."

"If he does, I shall go away, like Sister Grey," said Pattie, doggedly.

"But, dear Pattie, where could you go?"

"I knows, Miss Gerrie! I aren't bound to stay anywhere to be knocked about. My mother's always telling tales and setting father agin me. He'd no business to bring her to t' house. I reckon he wishes he hadn't, too. But it's no use crying o'er spilt milk, as grandmother says."

"Not a bit; so you must make the best of it. But come in my room and look at some things I have got for you."

Pattie gladly followed.

The articles were folded together on a chair. Gerrie was quite as tall as her cottage friend, and had several coloured dresses to bestow, which would be old-fashioned before she would be out of mourning. But Pattie refused to take more than one at present. If she did, her mother would take possession of them. Then Gerrie gave her a pretty hat and a jacket, which Pattie declared would be her Sunday best.

"Oh, Miss Gerrie, you are good! But I must beg you to keep the rest for me for a while. I hardly durst take them home, my mother will begrudge 'em me, and make game of me."

"How dare she, when you get them from me!" replied Gerrie, quite imperiously. "If she does, I shall tell papa, and she shall not live in our cottage. She is a cruel woman, I'm afraid."

"She *is* so, and leads my father a life. Grandmother says if he warn't a great big sheep, he wouldn't stand it."

Gerrie couldn't help laughing, but replied, seriously:

"You mustn't say a word against your father, because he is your real father, you know, Pattie; so he must love you."

"Nay, he don't; but some one does."

Gerrie guessed as much.

"Tell me who it is, Pattie. *Do*, there's a good girl. Do I know him?"

Gerrie longed to find out who the young man was, and began to make guesses. Was it Matthew Smart, a young fellow who used to be very often with Jacob, and who had helped Atkins in the garden?

"Him! Why, I wouldn't walk on t' same side o' t' road," was the answer.

Was it young Bingley, who was a clerk in the bank?

"Lor, Miss Gerrie, he wouldn't be seen speaking to sich as me! He'd more like look after you."

Gerrie was horrified. That lanky, gawky, ultra-genteel, conceited noodle look after her! She could almost have slapped Pattie. Why,

Jacob was a thousand times more worthy of her regard than such a poltroon!

"Please don't say such a thing, Pattie, ever any more, or I shall be too cross to speak."

So Gerrie was always far from the point, and she gave up guessing.

"You will trust me some day, won't you, Pattie?"

"I'd trust you now, Miss Gerrie; but it's *him*."

Pattie only giggled slightly, without any real mirth or happiness in her face, as she spoke of her mysterious young man.

"Do you love him, Pattie?"

"Lor, Miss Gerrie, not a bit! But anything's better than our house."

"It is very, *very* wicked to marry any one you don't love. I am quite sure it is," replied the young lady, in a severe tone. "Don't do it, Pattie; not if it were a prince. Don't you know what the Bible says, that it is better to have a 'dinner of herbs, where love is, than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith'?"

"So it is; but it's mother as makes the

hatred, not me. I don't hate any one but her; not even him."

"But you will do, you will do, Pattie, if you run away and get married to a man you don't love; and I shall hate him, Pattie, and be so dreadfully angry with you, I shall never give you anything more."

"Lor, Miss Gerrie, if I married him, I shall never want nothin'! But I've hard lines now, I can tell you."

"Do be patient, there's a dear, good Pattie! And when you get married, let me come and see your wedding."

Pattie looked very considering. There was no blush on her face; very little animation, except when she looked at the beautiful things Miss Gerrie had for her; then she smiled. There was an anxious, troubled look on her face that pained her friend to see. She looked thinner than ever, and her large, dark eyes had darker rims round them than usual.

"Oh, poor Pattie," said Gerrie, compassionately; "you are too young to have so many troubles. I am sure this young man, whoever he is, does not

love you as much as I do, or he would not be so sly. Is he ashamed of loving you because you are poor, or why is he so secret?"

"Why, Miss Gerrie, if Broughton knew as how he talked wi' me, it would set every old woman i' t' town a-jabbering. I shouldn't like that. I'd rather myself that nobbody should know; and if you hadn't seen summat I should never have telled you this much."

"Would you give this man up, if I asked papa to let you live here with me? You could do lots of things for me."

"No, Miss Gerrie, I durstn't now. I'm often scared out o' my life," and Pattie sat down and began to cry piteously. "Oh, Miss Gerrie, you've always been good to me. Don't ask me any more questions, and don't tell nobody, especially father."

Gerrie was sorely distressed. She no longer felt inclined to kiss Pattie, who, perhaps, allowed a horrid man to do that; but she put her hand on her shoulder, and said:

"I have told you I will not tell, and I keep my word, Pattie; but you make me quite unhappy."

"Oh, I am sorry, I am sorry to do that, Miss Gerrie. Please don't mind me any more. I shall go to mother afore long, perhaps, and that'll be a good job."

It was getting very late. They heard the Squire open the heavy porch-door, and Gerrie exclaimed:

"Poor Pattie! wipe your eyes, and always tell me your troubles, won't you? But I am quite sure I shall hate that man! Now you must go, for I must wish papa good night."

Pattie rose, looked round the comfortable bedroom, let her eyes rest lovingly on the heap of nice clothes, all ready for her reception, said she would call again for them, and went downstairs with Gerrie's outfit. As she went out of the back-door Gerrie entered the drawing-room, and found the Squire in extra good spirits, sipping a glass of sherry.

"Well, my little woman! Jessie is a capital companion for you, and she undertakes to make an experiment on Vernon to-morrow. Persuade him to be good. I should not like any harshness, especially as poor Grey is gone. She seemed fond of the boy."

"I am sure she was; but she fancied he would never be reformed, never be good, she said, and that was not kind of her at all. *I think much better of Vernie than she did.*"

The Squire's smile died away.

"It's late. Get to bed, Gerrie. Good night."

According to agreement Master Vernon was brought into the dining-room by his father, while Jessie and Gerrie were studying French together, the next morning. The expression on the boy's face was rather dogged. He did not relish the idea of vacating the stables and the companionship of the farm labourers for that of two grown-up young ladies. He could scarcely distinguish their difference in age. He stood silent and sullen enough, while his father exchanged a few remarks with the Rector's daughter, and even after he was gone.

"Find your slate, Vernon," said Gerrie.

"I don't know where it is."

"Look for it, dear——"

"What for? I hate lessons, I do; and I hate girls."

"Never mind," said Jessie, looking at him

fixedly, and speaking in a very decided manner. "You must do as you are told, and if you do that we shall be very good friends; but if you do not, you must be punished. I do not intend to be played with. I don't look like it, do I?"

Vernon stared at her somewhat awed, and he began to look about, as if searching for the slate.

"You know it is in the school-room, Vernie; but you can fetch it here," said his sister.

"I think, dear Gerrie, we had better go to the school-room, and not make every place alike. Come along, Vernon," said Jessie.

"I hate the school-room. I shan't go there," said Vernon, drawing away from the firm hand that was laid upon his shoulder.

"But you *must*, Vernon; you must do as you are told," and Jessie grasped his hand tightly, and led him through the door, or, rather, dragged him. When he got, as he fancied, outside the hearing of his father, he refused to budge another step, sat down on the ground and began to kick.

"Oh, Vernon, do be good, dear; Jessie is so kind."

"She isn't, I hate her. I want Sister Grey, I do."

Without more ado Jessie carried him in her strong young arms all along the corridor, he struggling and using terrible expressions of vengeance all the time. Jessie was determined to master the boy's rebellious spirit once for all. On reaching the school-room she shut the door, standing before it to prevent egress.

"Ring the bell, Gerrie!"

Gerrie did so, and in answer to the summons Jones appeared.

"Is there a dark closet on this side the house, Jones?"

"Yes, miss."

"Please lock Master Vernon up in it, and bring me the key."

Jones obeyed to the letter, and left the boy furiously raging on the floor, where he remained an hour thus engaged. Then Jessie went to him, and without turning the key, inquired if he were good.

"No, I'm not. I hate you."

Jessie returned to Gerrie, who was very unhappy for Vernon.

"Let us walk about the grounds, dear," said Jessie, "and I will speak to him again before lunch."

They did, and talk became interesting to both in discussing their plans for benefiting the parish.

Arthur proposed giving a series of lectures, and Dr. Jewel had given a reluctant consent. These were to be on Thursday evenings in the school-room, where weekly services were held on Wednesday evenings throughout the year. Few, indeed, had ever attended those services. The room had been ill-lighted, and everything dull and lifeless. They felt something must be done to make them brighter, something to draw the people, who lived almost like heathen in their midst.

"I wonder if they do feel and think like heathen," said Gerrie, "because they dress differently to what we do, have worse dinners, and no silver plate. Do you really think they don't like goodness, and beauty, and music, and pic-

tures, as well as we do because they don't possess them?"

"They don't like church, that is proved beyond dispute," replied Jessie, "and we want to find out why."

"I think they have so many reasons," said Gerrie. "Dear old Mrs. Atkins used to go because mamma scolded her if she did not; but she has told me she would a great deal rather go to chapel. She felt more as if God was with her there than in the church. 'No, Miss Gerrie,' she used to say, 'the church seems to me the world, the very world the Lord said we weren't to love.' She has said so often," continued Gerrie, "and I can quite see what she meant, can't you, Jessie?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, you see even you and I go dressed in our best, don't we? And we and the rich people all have the best seats; and our silk dresses rustle, and the ladies' heads are held high, and carriages stand sometimes at the gates. Then our seats are all cushioned, and our Bibles and Church Services glisten with gilding; and we wear

gloves, and in fact to them we appear like so many Dives. And as they sit among us in church, at a respectful distance, hearing fine prayers they scarcely understand, or a grand sermon in what to them is almost a foreign language because they hear it so seldom, they remember many a Lazarus at home lying sick and wounded, and ready to die, forgotten by all these churchgoers. So church seems to them nothing else than the wicked world."

"Well, I suppose there is some truth in what you say, especially as you have actually heard Mrs. Atkins say so."

"Yes, indeed, but she was not a heathen at all. She was such a good mother. She would go without anything to give it her children, and she would teach them to say their prayers, and to sing hymns, and sent them to church and the Sunday-school, because somehow she thought it was her duty; and, poor thing, she was so anxious to do her duty. And do you know, Jessie, I think a great many of the poor mothers set a good example to the rich ones, don't you? See how industrious they are, and how patient."

"Well, dear, we will go and see how Mrs. Vaughan conducts her mothers' meetings, and we shall be introduced to a good few. It is held this afternoon, at half-past two. I hope Vernon will be good in time for us to go, though we need not be there till later."

Lunch was on the table precisely at one; but Vernon still declared himself obstreperous, so they lunched without him. But when he heard the gong, he found he was getting terribly hungry, and wished he was seated at the dinner table. He recommenced to cry lustily; but no one went to him, according to the Squire's orders, until everything was cleared away. Then Jessie presented herself at the door, and putting the key in the lock, heard a suppressed sob. She opened the door, and the light from a window opposite disclosed the figure of the passionate boy huddled together in a corner.

"Come here, Vernon, and promise to be an obedient boy, then you need never spend such a miserable morning any more. You are quite old enough to understand that you must do as you are told, or be made to do so. Isn't it

better to do it at once? Come, tell me. You would not like really to be my master, and Gerrie's, and papa's, should you? What would you think of us if we let *that* be? Now be a wise, brave boy, and determine to give in your will to those who are older than you. Let us be good friends for the future, shall we? Some day you will be a man yourself, please God, when you can give *your* orders, and people must obey you."

Vernon liked that prospect, and he liked Jessie better because she had not preached, only talked to him, to which he had not so decided an objection.

She did not offer to kiss him, either, as if he were a baby; but said: "Come, let us shake hands and understand each other; at present I am to rule, and you to obey, and then some day it will be your turn to command, and others to obey."

So Vernon shook hands, and said he wanted his dinner.

"But you must promise not to trouble me so much any more, or I must think of some more severe punishment for next time."

"Oh, you needn't. It's no use holding out till I'se bigger. I'll do as you tell me till I grow big, if you aren't too hard upon a feller."

In her turn, Jessie promised she would not be that, so they went out hand in hand to the school-room, where Master Vernon's dinner was brought, and he was left in the care of nurse and Jones. He was somewhat ashamed of his incarceration, so they found him much more tractable than usual, and the Squire was much amused at the bargain struck between his son and the Rector's daughter.

That afternoon, about three o'clock, Jessie and Gerrie, accompanied by Mrs. Price, entered a long, narrow room, called "The Elms," where Mrs. Vaughan held her mothers' meeting. It was a gloomy-looking room, warmed by a stove. The lady sat at the head of a long square-cornered table, covered with green baize. On the table was a pile of hymn-books, out of which some half-dozen women, decently clothed, had just been singing; and were now speaking to each other in subdued whispers. The room, with its bare boards and hard forms, had such a dreary look,

Gerrie imagined the sun could never shine there. There was a religious paper open on the table, containing short, suitable extracts, chiefly about the inspiring career of some reformed drunkard—followed by a simple tale, concerning the unlucky offspring of depraved parents, like “Jessica’s First Prayer,” “Lost Gyp,” etc., very pretty, and very thrilling, to stir up the imaginations of poor honest mothers, ready to lay down their lives for their own little ones.

Jessie and Gerrie were introduced to the lady who conducted the meeting, and who was a thorough Christian, eager for the salvation of the souls of the poor, neglected lower orders. They sat down awaiting the return of the Vicar’s wife, who had to make a call in the neighbourhood, ostensibly for the purpose of observing how to manage their own meetings some future day.

Presently Mrs. Vaughan commenced reading, in voice and manner very like a very orthodox clergyman of the church.

It was first a choice extract out of the paper before-mentioned.

Then, with a remark to her visitors, she continued a chapter from her book.

Neither Jessie nor Gerrie could listen, their thoughts were busy with the women before them, and the probable homes they had left behind. First one and then another kept dropping in, till there must have been at least between twenty and thirty. Some brought a baby in their arms, and another infant lagging behind, or hanging to their skirts; but these hapless little ones were wonderfully quiet, and cloth picture-books were provided for their amusement. They had not all needle-work; some sat still, as if the effort of listening, with having lost the thread of the story, was quite as much as they could do. One woman, wrapped in a shawl, in which she buried her hands, took an afternoon's siesta, under the circumstances, no doubt known only to herself, very pardonable.

Two others Gerrie noticed, were very quietly carrying on a conversation the whole time in whispers. Another was as deaf as a post, a bold, bad-looking woman, noted for terrible drinking bouts.

A comfortable, rosy-faced old dame, Gerrie

heard say that "she had a deal rather be at her own fireside."

Before the chapter was ended, all heads were turned with evident satisfaction towards the door, which was heard to open and close, while the well-known figure of a young curate advanced to the table.

"Well, mothers! Glad to see such a fair muster of you," he said, pleasantly, Then he shook hands with Mrs. Vaughan and the two young visitors, who laughed inwardly at finding themselves about to be addressed by an unmarried curate as if they were among the English matrons. Gerrie wondered at so young a man venturing to talk to these mature people, and what on earth he would find to say. He seemed not in the least disconcerted.

They sang another hymn. Then the curate read a portion of Scripture, and gave an exhortation on the general duties of mothers sending their children to Sunday-school, having the babies baptized, the elder ones confirmed, and one and all attending church. He enlarged, moreover, on the extra amount of patience required by mothers

in general. All he said was perhaps appropriate enough, but Gerrie did not like it.

As soon as he had closed the meeting with prayer, which was still more unappreciated by the visitors — Gerrie detested long, extempore prayers—he took his departure, and Mrs. Vaughan opened a kind of register, and called out the names of the women present. Then another book was produced, in which was entered the amount of pence given towards a clothing club by any of the members.

By that time it was a little after four, and the mothers had to hurry home to get ready for the return of children from school; and if our young friends could have followed them, they would have seen for themselves the amount of energy required to make up for lost time.

Still Mrs. Price had not returned, and, for want of something to say, Jessie asked the object of their meetings. Mrs. Vaughan seemed rather surprised at the inquiry, as if the object must be apparent at once.

“I really can’t imagine,” said Gerrie. “It is not to teach them to sew, is it?”

"Most certainly not. Though I dare say it is the only sewing they do through the week," replied Mrs. Vaughan, with most mistaken emphasis.

"Is it to give them an opportunity of listening to prayers and the Bible?"

"Of course, that is one most desirable object. Many of them attend no place of worship, and their minds are positively dark regarding religious truths. The special object, however, is, I believe, to attract these women to the church, and that we may become in a certain way acquainted with our poor people. They are so very difficult to reach."

"They seem to behave very much as if they were at church, or at school," said Gerrie.

"Well, you see, if we allowed them to talk much, it might lead to so much gossiping. The poor are so much given to that at their own doors that we must not encourage it; and, besides, they would become familiar in manner and very objectionable if we did not keep them at a certain distance. They are generally liable to encroach."

Gerrie thought to herself: "If they are a different race, why not leave them altogether in peace, poor things!" But she did not care to hear any more, only to think; and this meeting seemed to give her food for her mind for a long time. She left Jessie and Mrs. Vaughan to converse together, asking permission to walk round the room to examine the pictures on the walls. They did not interest her. One or two of the thin, weary faces of the poor mothers remained as indelible on her mind's eye. She had looked at each woman individually and critically. She never looked at people *en masse*. She had the power of singling them out, and reading some story in each face. Those faces she would most likely never see again—poor creatures! What remains of beauty some had; what gleams of bright intelligence; what stoical endurance! In others, what brute force, or even self-indulgence as far as gratification was possible to their means; and, after all, what a little difference existed between the countenances of these poor mothers and those of the ladies at the Dorcas meeting, if each had been clothed in uniform! What was

the difference ; how define it ; and why, oh why, should it exist ? And was there no compensation in another world for all the hardships and sufferings, physical and mental, endured by the majority in this existence ?

CHAPTER XIV.

THE long school-room was crowded. On the unpretentious little platform stood Arthur Jewel. A glowing smile lit up his kind young face, as he looked down on his humble audience, who kept up for some moments a vociferous cheering.

He was dressed in no broadcloth, but wore a rough tweed suit, resembling that worn by the men themselves, when they cast aside their pit clothing. Perhaps his hair was not quite so well greased, or his face quite so shiny as some of his fellow-men, and his shirt-collar might have been a little whiter and better starched than that of some of his audience.

This was his second lecture of a series of six, and his subject was "Temperance."

When silence was secured, he began:

"I feel myself uncommonly venturesome, when I attempt to address those of you, who in many things are much wiser than I am, you who were thinking hard long before I was born. But God has given all of us a thinking and a speaking apparatus, which no one can use for us.

"Some have tremendous thinking powers, and their deeds prove it; those who have only talking powers, sometimes allow their fine speeches all to end in smoke. Yet the gift of language is very valuable, and if any of us possess it in any degree, God grant we may use it to His glory, and the good of our fellow-men.

"Our subject to-night, my friends, is Temperance, for though the inhabitants of so obscure a village, we must not be behind the times, if we can help it; and we know the usual epidemic of Total Abstinence platform fever is now begun. This subject affects our national welfare, politically, socially, morally, and religiously, which proves its importance.

"Some of its advocates would stifle debates on any other question. License laws, local option,

Sunday closing, are to these alone of paramount importance. All liquor traffic in their estimation is wicked, all State revenues arising therefrom iniquitous. Drink is a demon; and all brewers, publicans, etc., are doing devils' work.

"But it is not as a total abstinence advocate that I am about to address you, and consider such views not only incompatible with common-sense, but incompatible to us as Christians. People unacquainted with this total abstinence craze, have been known to raise their hands in amazement and demand: 'What then is this? Is it a new religion?'

"Is it a fact that our Christianity of nineteen centuries duration, has been unable to grapple with this ancient drink question? Have there been no drunkards reformed, clothed, and sitting in their right minds, until this pledge was invented some fifty years ago?

"On these so-called temperance, or Gospel-temperance platforms, we hear men and women declare publicly that to this new idol they owe health and strength, prosperity and promotion; nay, everything worth having for time and eternity.

“To any Christ-loving soul, if they give consideration to this subject, it must be a wrong enthusiasm that so wildly urges a practice that has not His example as an incentive. It is a fact that Jesus our Lord and Master, whom Christians profess to follow, whom they profess to believe infallible, was during His earthly sojourn a moderate partaker of alcohol; and both by precept and example, allowed Himself so to be considered. This is undeniable. Therefore moderation is a much higher standard of morality, than total abstinence; and, whatever standard I place before myself, shall be the same that I place before you. I will never lower it for the brave fellows I know most of you to be.

“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, so taught. What more do we want? We have a real Physician and require no quack medicine. Let Secularists, Agnostics, or Atheists adopt that rôle. When Christ sent out His seventy disciples, we are informed that He bade them eat and *drink* such things as were set before them, asking no questions. And behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.

“If we question the uneducated teetotalers, they begin at once to make all kinds of excuses for their Lord and Master. They want to exonerate Him if possible. They tell us the times have changed, that if He were on earth now, considering the conditions of things, He would be on their side, and perhaps wear the blue ribbon ; or, they urge that the wine He drank, and the wine He made, was not intoxicant, thus accusing Him of deception.

“I don’t believe it, I never will believe it. His teaching, His example were those for all ages, even while sun and moon endure, and we are convinced that no power on earth, or in Heaven, could improve on His conduct or precepts. They are for all times, past, present, and future. I am jealous of His honour. I cannot, I *could* not, to save millions of degraded men, teach that His example could possibly be improved upon. Let Him be true, if all other men are liars.”

There was a pause. Arthur was deeply moved. He drank a little water, and recovered his self-possession.

“But, my dear friends,” he continued, “my fellow workmen, don’t mistake me. Don’t think for one moment that I countenance or wink at the awful sin of drunkenness, which steals like a pestilence over our land, the terrible consequences of which are too innumerable to calculate, too awful to express. Let us fight against it to a man; but try to make no mistake about it. *Drunkenness*, not *drink*, is the deadly foe of this country. The *drunkard*! He is the veritable demon stalking about amongst us, a disgrace as much to our civilisation as to our professed Christianity. A private drunkard must answer to God. The public drunkard is a criminal, and should be punished as such. I have no more sympathy for him than I have for the felon; nay, often not half so much. I have no maudlin pity for him. The sight of one disgusts me, and makes me blush for my country. At present a great many temperance lectures are anything but elevating to hear. Men, who have led lives of utter degradation, ascend the platform and speak of their horrible past, as if any mortal being could be either the better or wiser for listening to their

experiences. Of this I am quite convinced, that no one need take the pledge for the sake of giving countenance to the reformed drunkard, who is generally by no means desirous of hiding his shame, evidently considering himself very little to blame, but a kind of martyr. As long as so much fuss is made about the drunkard's terrible temptations, about his or her being the *victims* of drink, the victim of the publican, of bad companions, or inherited vice, I really don't know how we are to get rid of him. Is he any more the victim of temptation than any other sinner who falls a prey to the vicious abuse of God's good gifts?

"The other day I was coming down a lane. From a cottage door I heard infant cries, and found that the child had knocked its head against a wooden stool, which his mother was striking vigorously, exclaiming, 'Naughty, bad chair, to hurt my Jimmy,' and Jimmy, luckless urchin, was thus being consoled. Ah, thought I, that child is being reared for a splendid teetotaler. He stumbles against a useful article, and hurts himself, and is taught to believe that the stool

is the guilty party and not himself. My friends, there is no inanimate atom in creation that is useless or bad. Our abuse of them even does not make *them* evil.

“All the ingenuity of man has been exercised in producing the most fearful instruments of torture, but they remain perfectly harmless until human agency forces them into deadly action. The rack, the guillotine, the axe, the gallows, the sword, gunpowder, poison, opium, wine, spirits, beer, are all as innocent of evil as a baby’s rattle, until man’s folly or madness turns them against himself.

“Man invents. He is endowed with that supreme gift; he can blame himself alone when he uses his own inventions for his ultimate ruin.

“Why, even the elements can, in a measure, be made subservient to man. But what terrible masters they are; yet the most arbitrary forces against which a man has to contend, are those passions within him. Well might Solomon declare, ‘That he who ruleth his spirit, is greater than he who taketh a city,’ greater than a Napoleon,

greater than a Nelson. A drunkard is a man who gives loose rein to his passion, and requires restraint — forcible restraint. If drunkenness is a disease, it is a disease that prison discipline always cures; and, whenever it is a public offence, it ought invariably to be punished. I dare say you think I am hard; that a man must have a glass and a rest, and a cosy chat with his fellow-men on his way home from work.

“Well, my men, I am not going to dictate to you about that. Some of your homes are a joy to enter, and some almost a little hell upon earth. Perhaps it is your own fault, perhaps not. But I know myself what it is to come home tired from work, both hot and thirsty, and I have called in the ‘Black Swan,’ asked for a glass of bitter beer, and felt refreshed for it. So doing has given me an opportunity of seeing for myself what a ‘public-house’ *might* be, and what it too often is. That the houses are public, ought to be a guarantee of their respectability. It is a disgrace to our civilisation, still more to our Christianity, that they are so often horrible dens of vice. We cannot make men godly, or

even sober by legislation; but we can, and ought to, suppress all public vice. If I had had the power I should have been glad sometimes to punish Mr. Jones and every man in the bar; for I have seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears, what made my blood boil, and I am glad to have the opportunity of telling you publicly how ashamed I felt of my fellow-men. Some of you fellows were all unwashed, for which, however, you are not always to blame; but the way you were standing about, talking coarsely, drinking heavily, and swearing wickedly, horrified me. And I have asked myself, need these things be—these horrible, disgusting sights? And I ask you, my friends, shall we not all answer: No, they need not, they shall not be; we will stop them at least here in Broughton. It is in our own power so to do; and where it is not in our power, we will welcome laws, however stringent, that will suppress vice in our midst, for such are merciful and kind even to those they punish.

“We do not wish to close all ‘public-houses.’ Nothing of the sort. We want to make them

what they were intended to be, clean, decent, respectable houses of refreshment, where nothing foul should be tolerated. Talk of boycotting. There are two kinds of men I would send to Coventry: the one the habitual drunkard, and the other that man who knowingly allows him to drink more than is good for him.

“A drunkard is a disgrace to human nature. I blame the man, not the drink, for the bestiality; nay, worse, the human monstrosity of the man. Of course, the publican, the police, and the public are also frequently to blame for permitting such open vice.

“Why should we feel more tender mercies for such a selfish sin than we do for thieving, when hunger, or cold, or another’s distress is the sad temptation? Sinners we all are; vicious we need none of us be, for vice, such as gluttony and drunkenness, is even a degradation to our poor humanity.

“My friends, I am your fellow-man. You think I am above you because of my many advantages of family, education, and means. In these particulars I may be; but in many things, far

more essential, you can not only come up to my level, but surpass me. I beg you all to aim after that. It is strange, but no less true, that all the best things are attainable to all, but because they are so, are often least valued. To be virtuous is better than to be learned, to be wise is better than to be clever, and you may, one and all, be both wise and virtuous; and to be moderate not only in meat and drink, but in everything, is true virtue and the highest wisdom. We have all one ideal of all perfection, let us try to follow in His steps, and we cannot but fight to a man against the world, the flesh, and the devil. We shall not squander enthusiasm in that warfare, as it seems to me the advocates of total abstinence do.

“Drunkenness is not the only way a man can show himself intemperate, and it is against intemperance we must contend. Intemperance in language, in eating, sleeping, in love, in anger, in smoking, even in reading. What we all need is moderation, self-control, self-mastery; without this we are mere slaves, victims of our own passions.

“I hope no teetotaler here will think I have

been unable to appreciate the spirit in which he hopes to do good; indeed, I know it is often one of pure self-sacrifice; but, for all that, I think the principle of total abstinence is of itself intemperance in another form. There seems to me no need and no justification for any new commandments, and I repudiate a new decalogue altogether, however the times may have changed. The law from Sinai and the Sermon on the Mount are more than we can attain unto, and as much as we can strive after. So I will conclude this short address with the advice of St. Paul: 'Let your moderation,' not your total abstinence, 'be known unto all men.' I have often been asked what moderation is; it would be very difficult to enlighten any one that does not know, and I am quite sure no one here is so ignorant as that.

"I don't mean these lectures to be long. I give them just that you and I may become better acquainted with each other, and I propose that when I have given a series of six, one of you should take up the rôle and give another six. Don't be shy about it, just speak from your

heart, and you are sure to reach another heart, sometimes *all* hearts. My next lecture will be on 'Power,' a very good thing indeed in its way, as I hope to prove to you. And now we will sing loyally, 'God save the Queen.'"

The whole assembly were on their feet in a moment, singing the well-known strain lustily enough, Joe Bannington's voice heard above all others, as he stood near the platform, his eyes closed firmly as if to shut out all harmony but his own. One man called out: "Just another for Mr. Arthur;" but Arthur exclaimed: "No, no. Silence, please."

Instantaneously the solemnity of that bright young face was reflected on his audience. He raised his hands, clasped them together, and bowed his head as he asked God's blessing.

The silence was intense. Such a meeting was something so new in the parish. The women felt inclined to sob. Men's hearts were touched, and when they moved to go, their voices were hushed involuntarily. Some of them lingered to shake hands with that brave young fellow who had determined to live and die among them. But

Arthur was too much moved himself; he could hardly comprehend his own emotions. He remained on the platform, where he was joined by Jacob, who helped to put out the paraffin lamps by which the room was illumined.

"Did you agree with what I said, Jacob?" asked Arthur.

"Every word, sir."

"You must always tell me when you don't."

"That I will. This time I have not a word to say but thanks."

Old John Brown, principal farmer, butcher, and the people's churchwarden, had been present. He was a notable drunkard, as were most of the largest farmers in Broughton. He did not wait to speak to Arthur; he felt as if he had been personally attacked, and walked out into the night feeling a smaller man than he had ever felt before in his life. He was angry; all the more so because he knew that the young man had said not a word but what was true. At any rate he walked past the "Black Swan" on his way home, and smoked his pipe sulkily enough in his capacious arm-chair by the snug kitchen fire. His wife's surprise

was intense. She was used to John returning half seas over, good-tempered and jovial enough; and here he was sober and as cross as two sticks. Her John—the best-tempered man in the place, and respected, too, in spite of his drunken bouts! Who could help respecting a fine, handsome-looking fellow with the biggest farm, the finest cattle, the fattest sheep and pigs in the country; one who never refused a call for charity, who was never out from his seat in church, who drove to market in his handsome trap to Lutterfield every Saturday; and, moreover, was churchwarden, and had been for years? Respect him! Of course they did; and when he was partially intoxicated was just the time they could draw an extra shilling from his big leathern purse; while his teetotal wife was as mean as a Jew, and always a-grumbling, and never at rest.

“What’s up, John?” she asked. “You look as surly as a bear.”

“Never you mind. I’ve not come from t’ ‘Swan.’”

“Did I say yer had? But wheer have yer come from?”

"From t' school-room. I've ben to Mr. Arthur's lecture, and the young beggar has been pitching into me like all that!"

"Nay, John; never! That's more nor he nor any one dare do."

"Th' young chap were right enough, and I've none the excuse as has them poor hardworking chaps. My hearth is always clean, my fire as bright as that at t' 'Swan,' and yet I stop, when I shouldn't."

"You might stop wi'out getting drunk, I should think," replied his wife, who had tried all her powers of tongue and temper to keep him sober.

"Tha'rt right. I've note to say, lass, but that I'm a fule."

"It ain't drink as maks yer stop, for yo' could have plenty o' that at home. It's the company."

"Again tha'rt right, Sal. It's t' company one meets, talk one hears. It's oft pleasanter than what one gets here, anyhow."

"For mysen, my hands is too full to want so much company."

“Now then, lass, suppose, i’stead of stopping at t’ ‘Swan,’ I brought a few friends in ’ere, and gave un a glass, and we had our pipes, and enjoyed ourselves a bit, what would you say?”

“What! You ar’n’t a-going to turn *my* house into a public, that’s certain. When yer wants such company yo’ must seek it elsewhere.”

John Brown knew what she would say. He sat still and made no answer. She brought in supper—cold fat bacon, cheese, and good beer. He ate and drank moderately, and returned to his pipe. His wife said scarcely anything; the cat and dog on the hearth were scarcely less communicative. His thoughts wandered back to the public-house, to the exciting talk, the bright and cheerful smiles of the landlady, the hearty laugh, the good jokes, the conviviality of the place, and he longed to be there.

“There’s no place like it,” he muttered to himself. “I’ll be blowed if there is; though I could ’a listened a good bit longer to Mester Arthur. He’s got a tongue, ’as that young chap—if he’d but take another subject. I’ll go next time, that I will—and try if I can’t keep sober

till then. It is a shame if I can't manage mysen as well as he."

He went to bed sober that night, and found that he got up the next morning none the worse for the achievement.

Arthur returned home with Jacob; the three young ladies, Jessie, Laura, and Gerrie, having been fetched by the Squire.

"You'll hear a deal about your lecture, sir," said Jacob.

"Most happy," replied Arthur, "but I will not provoke antagonism."

"No, sir, no; but you will meet with opposition."

"Moderate abuse, I hope," said Arthur. "I am not afraid."

Pattie Atkins had been present—well-dressed, but with her usual apathy. She had looked more beautiful than any one in the room. Arthur had been afraid to say a word that could possibly attract her attention; yet he wondered if those beautiful dreamy eyes, that sweet mouth, those delicate ears had taken in anything of the spirit of his lecture. Her expression of face had

scarcely varied. She had occasionally fixed those wondrous dark orbs on his face, and he had turned his aside, lest in meeting hers he should betray the agitation he felt. Was there a grand grasping soul enclosed in that beautiful but delicate and long-neglected frame? Or was it a narrow soul, quite satisfied with personal comfort, if only that could be attained? He had noticed nothing particular in the expression of her face by which to feed his imagination. He longed to dive deep into the inner recesses of her mind, but hitherto all his attempts had been utterly futile. He could not draw her out. But she had been present; she had been attentive; she had looked as if she could understand; and Jacob he knew had a hero soul, and was now taking his sister home, and on the way discoursing with her, perhaps on what he, Arthur, had been saying. And so he was.

“Isn’t Mr. Arthur grand, Pattie? I tell you he’ll be a great man some of these days, though he does get black.”

“He’s right enough. He can talk, anyhow,”

replied Pattie. "But I'm glad he isn't a great, soft teetotaler. I don't like that suit he had on. Why can't he dress like Mr. John?"

"He doesn't want to; he cares for summat better than fine clothes."

"He likes to hear himsen talk. When I went to hear some one at Lutterfield, my! he had on a swaller-tail coat, like our master when he goes to a party—and showed all his shirt-front, and had his hair parted down the middle."

"Great, soft barm-pot!" exclaimed Jacob.

"How do you know? T' Squire isn't soft, is he? and he minds how he dresses."

"You girls care for note else, I think. I believe you were thinking more of Mr. Arthur's coat than aught," he said.

"Well, if I was; what do *I* care about drink, and temperance, and soldiers, and such-like? That's for men."

"Yes, but girls and women have to fight the foes Mr. Arthur talked on."

"Now, then, don't let us have it over again," said Pattie. "I like Mr. Arthur anyhow, he always

looks kind at me, and always gives me a good word, and I don't want *your* preaching to set me against him."

"Sometimes I believe he thinks too much of you wi' your pretty face," said Jacob, angrily, who was always up in the clouds, with his imagination running riot.

"And you think too much of Miss Gerrie. I seed you'd been a-drawing of her. Ay, tha' great, soft thing! What's th' use?"

"Suppose Mr. Arthur thinks too much of Pattie? How do you like him?"

"Mr. Arthur!! Lor, Jacob, he's too high up for any one I knows; he's too good even for Miss Gerrie. You see, he'll never marry." And Pattie became silent and thoughtful.

Jacob was puzzled. Pattie was evidently an admirer of Mr. Arthur, or she would not have made such a remark. She was not an educated girl, her mind was almost chaotic; but she had read her Bible sometimes, and all her heroes were taken from its sacred pages. St. John, the Apostle whom Jesus loved, was her greatest

hero, and in her heart she likened Mr. Arthur to St. John. She felt that he would have taken care of the bereaved mother with equal tenderness, that he would spend his time in seeking out the lost and miserable, in living as no other man lived, in seeing unearthly visions of a future Heaven, and that with the present world he had very little to do. He was too noble, too holy to seek the love of any girl, and for such a one as her, he felt only tender pity. She knew he compassionated her, having such hard lines with a horrid step-mother ; she knew he grieved when he saw how she was worked beyond her strength, and that there was no hope of anything for her ; she believed that he would be positively grateful to any one who would take her out of her miserable circumstances, and give her ease and comfort ; but that *he* should lower himself to court her, was too degrading to him to dream about. Jacob's words had put the possibility in her mind, and, as long as it remained, even *clothes* were forgotten.

When she went to bed that night, it was to dream of Mr. Arthur, dressed in a real swallow-

tail, with an open waistcoat, talking incomprehensible nonsense on that unpretentious platform. But she could make nothing out of his discourse, and even in her dreams, he never descended to her level, or asked her to be his bride.

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